HEPHAESTION

Simon Braunstein

HEPHAESTION

PART ONE

written and illustrated by
Simon Braunstein

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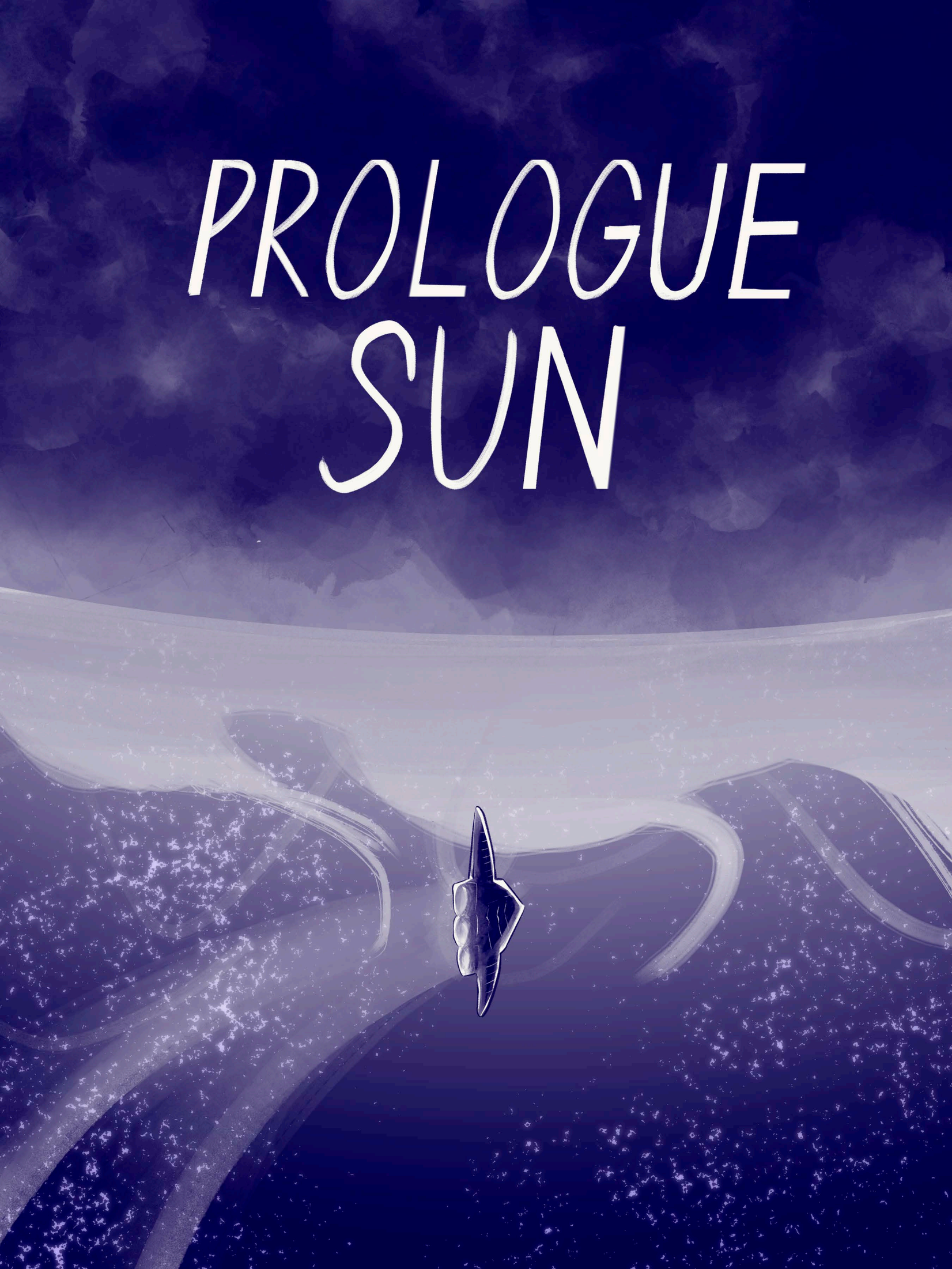
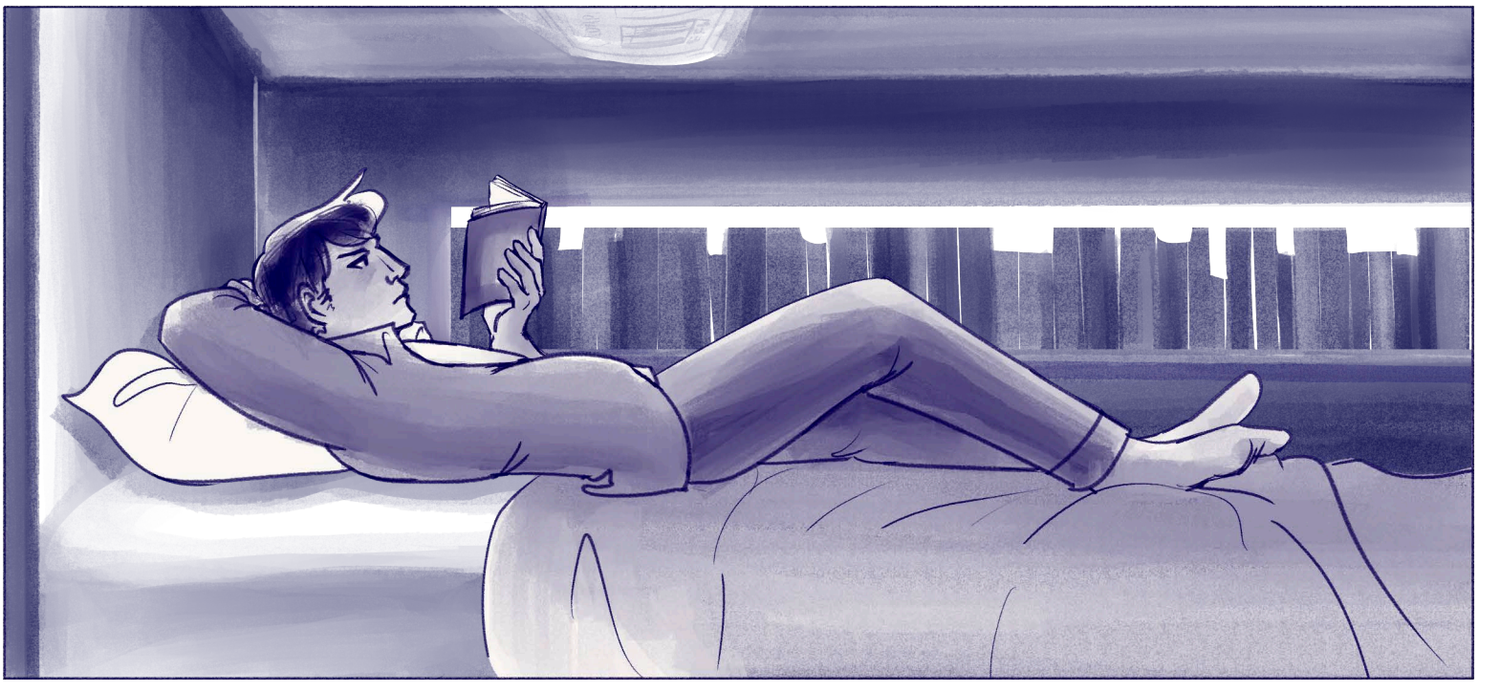

PROLOGUE
SUN

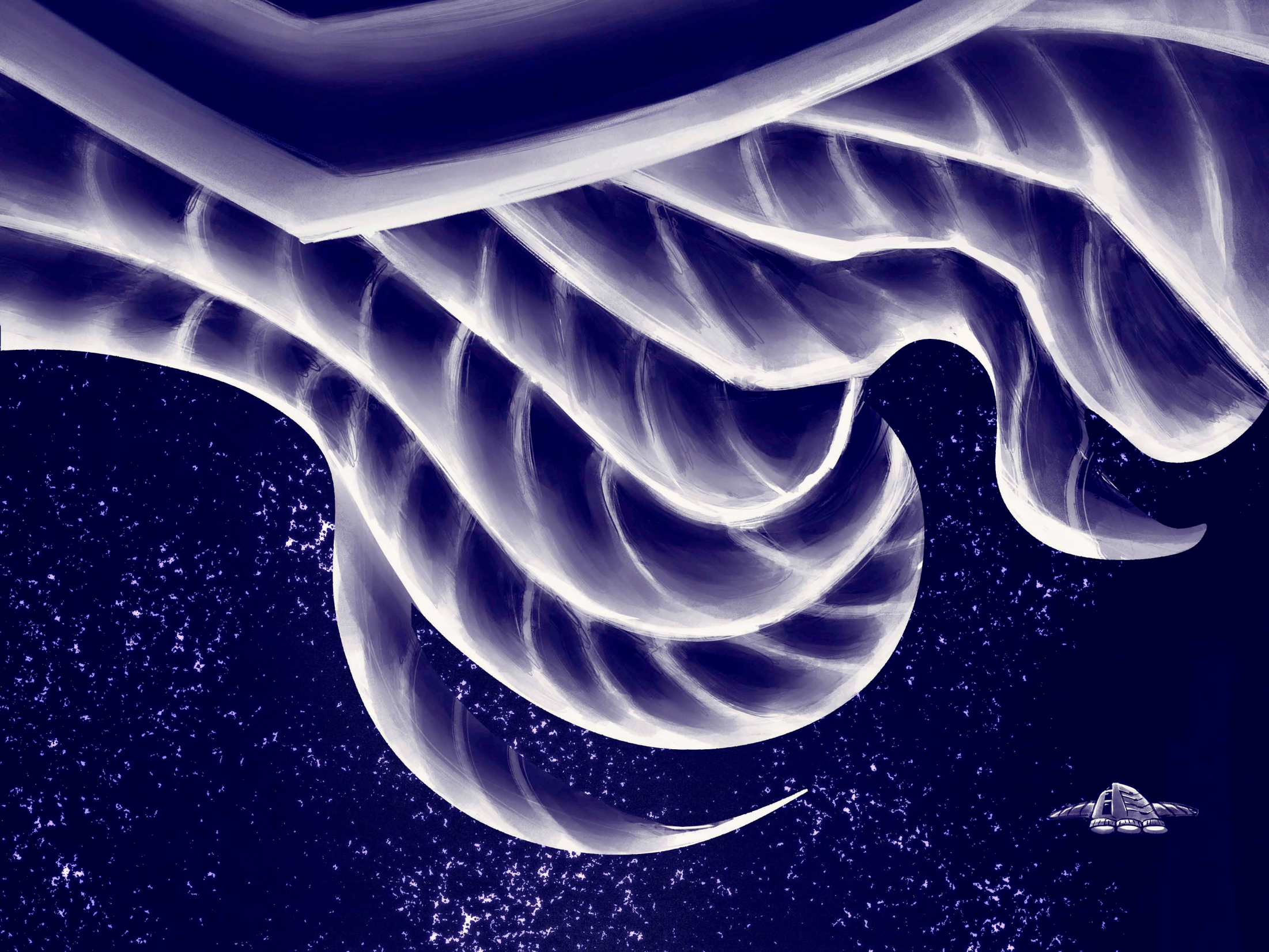


Sunlight

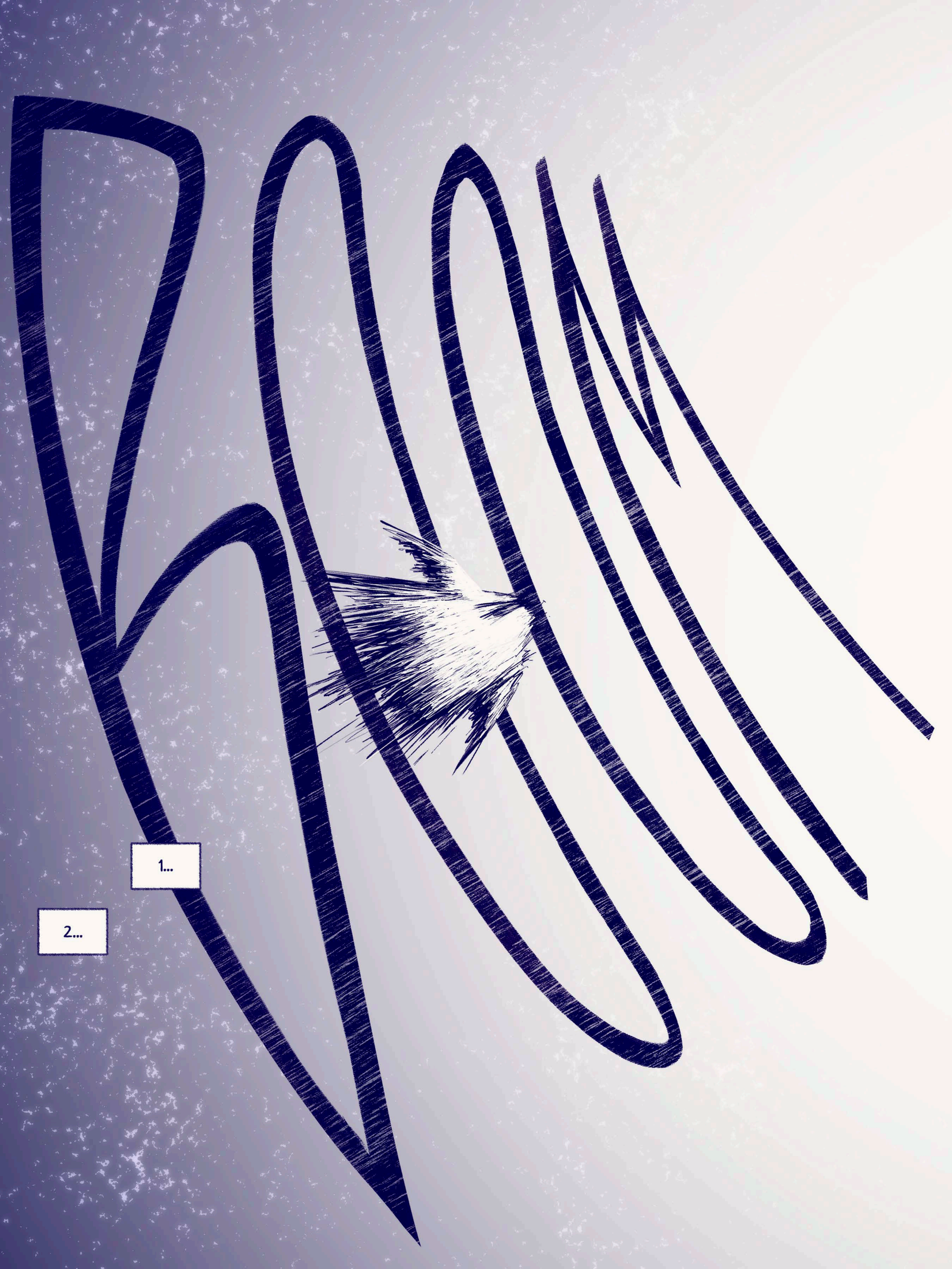
ALERT 450
ACTION REQUIRED
BEEP BEEP BEEP
"Hey Onyx!" a voice calls. I glance up
none other than Edric Calamatus.
"How's it going, Edric?" I ask. "Anything
new?"
I decide to wear a leather dress,
with black fishnets under combat

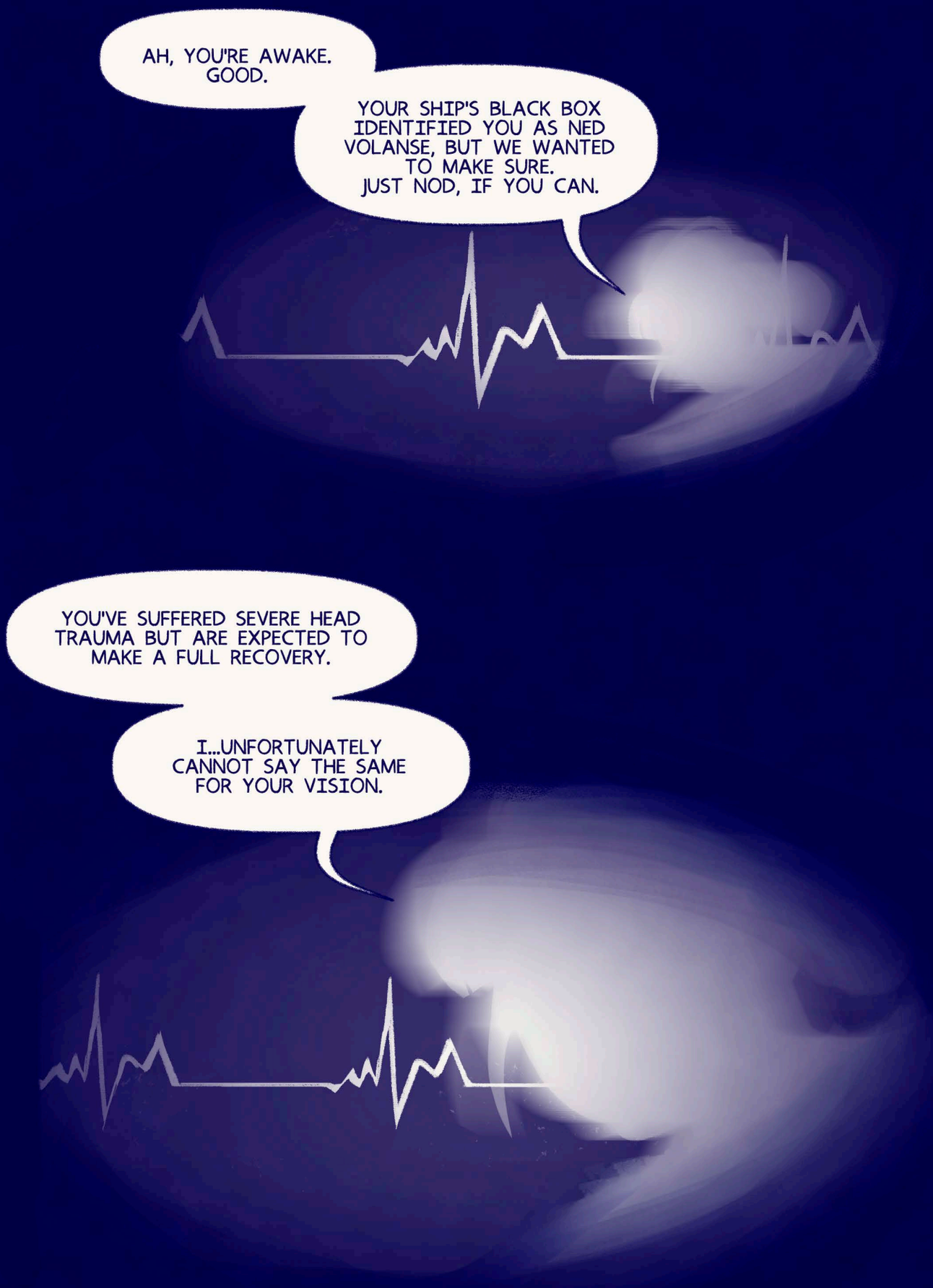
THUNK
SHIT!

HUH. WASN'T A WARZONE A FEW MONTHS AGO.
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

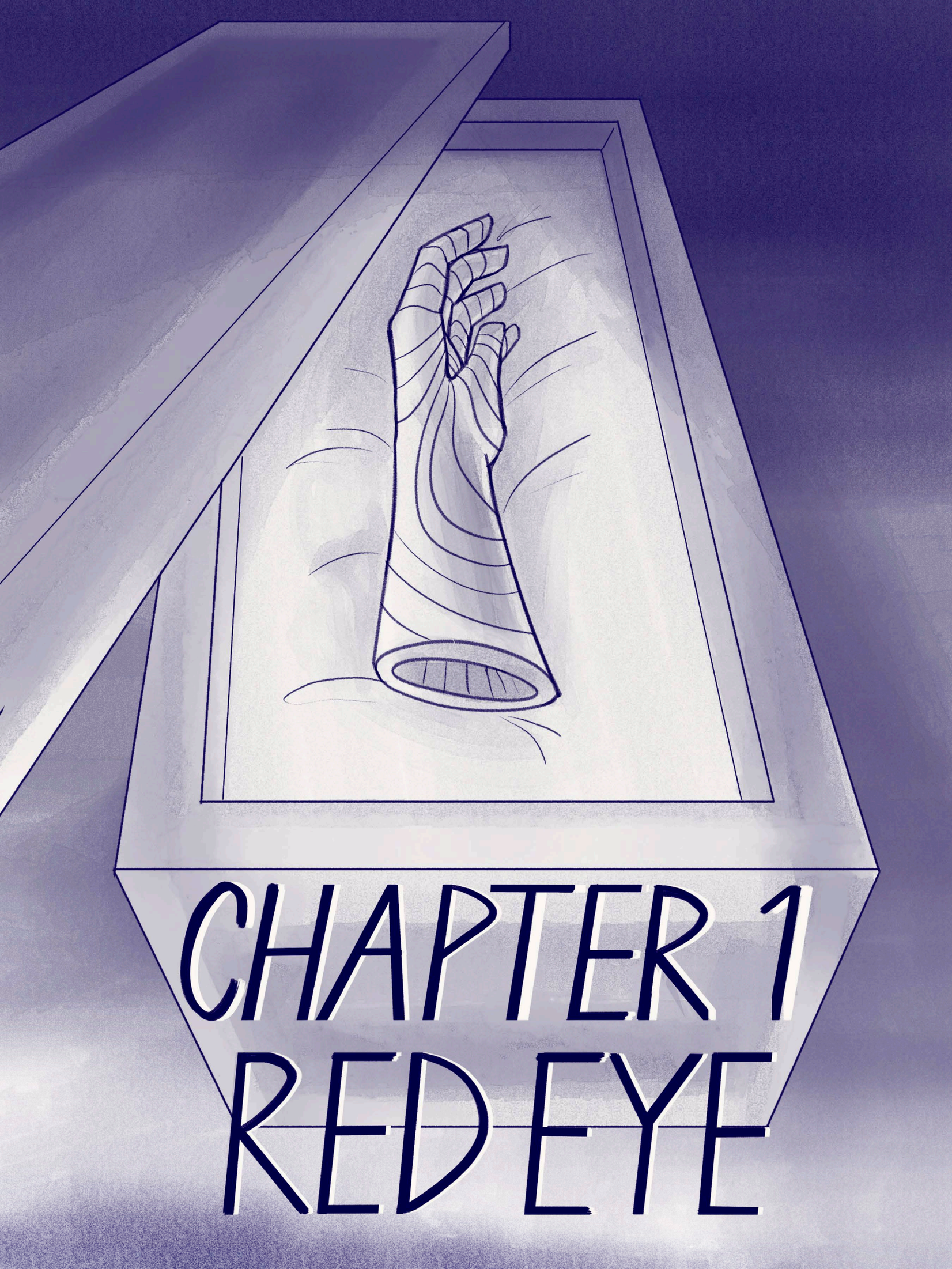


UNKNOWN VESSEL, THIS IS CALLSIGN MIKE-MIKE-BRAVO-ZERO-NINER-SEVEN-SIX, DO YOU READ? OVER.
...INTERFERENCE...
THIS IS A CIVILIAN VESSEL, I REPEAT, THIS IS A CIVILIAN VESSEL! PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE, OVER!
...NO CHOICE BUT TO ENGAGE IF THERE CONTINUES TO BE NO RESPONSE...
COME ON, COME ON!
ENGAGING IN 10...
9...
8...
7...
6...
5...
4...
3...

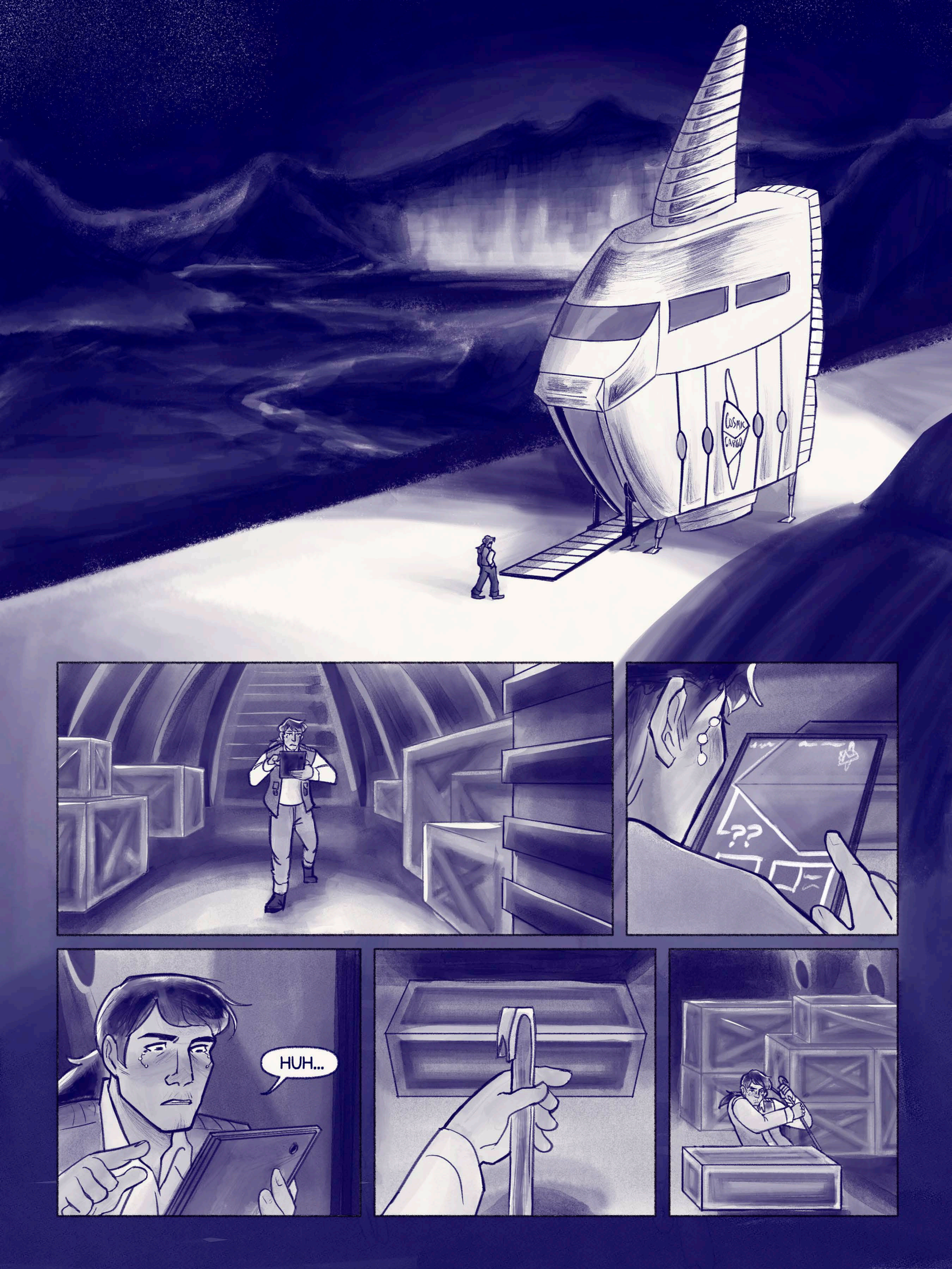

1...
2...


AH, YOU'RE AWAKE. GOOD.
YOUR SHIP'S BLACK BOX IDENTIFIED YOU AS NED VOLANSE, BUT WE WANTED TO MAKE SURE. JUST NOD, IF YOU CAN.
YOU'VE SUFFERED SEVERE HEAD TRAUMA BUT ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE A FULL RECOVERY.
I...UNFORTUNATELY CANNOT SAY THE SAME FOR YOUR VISION.

THE SHRAPNEL TORE THROUGH YOUR CORNEA. WHATEVER EYESIGHT YOU HAVE LEFT WILL BE...
...SEVERELY LIMITED.


CHAPTER 1
RED EYE

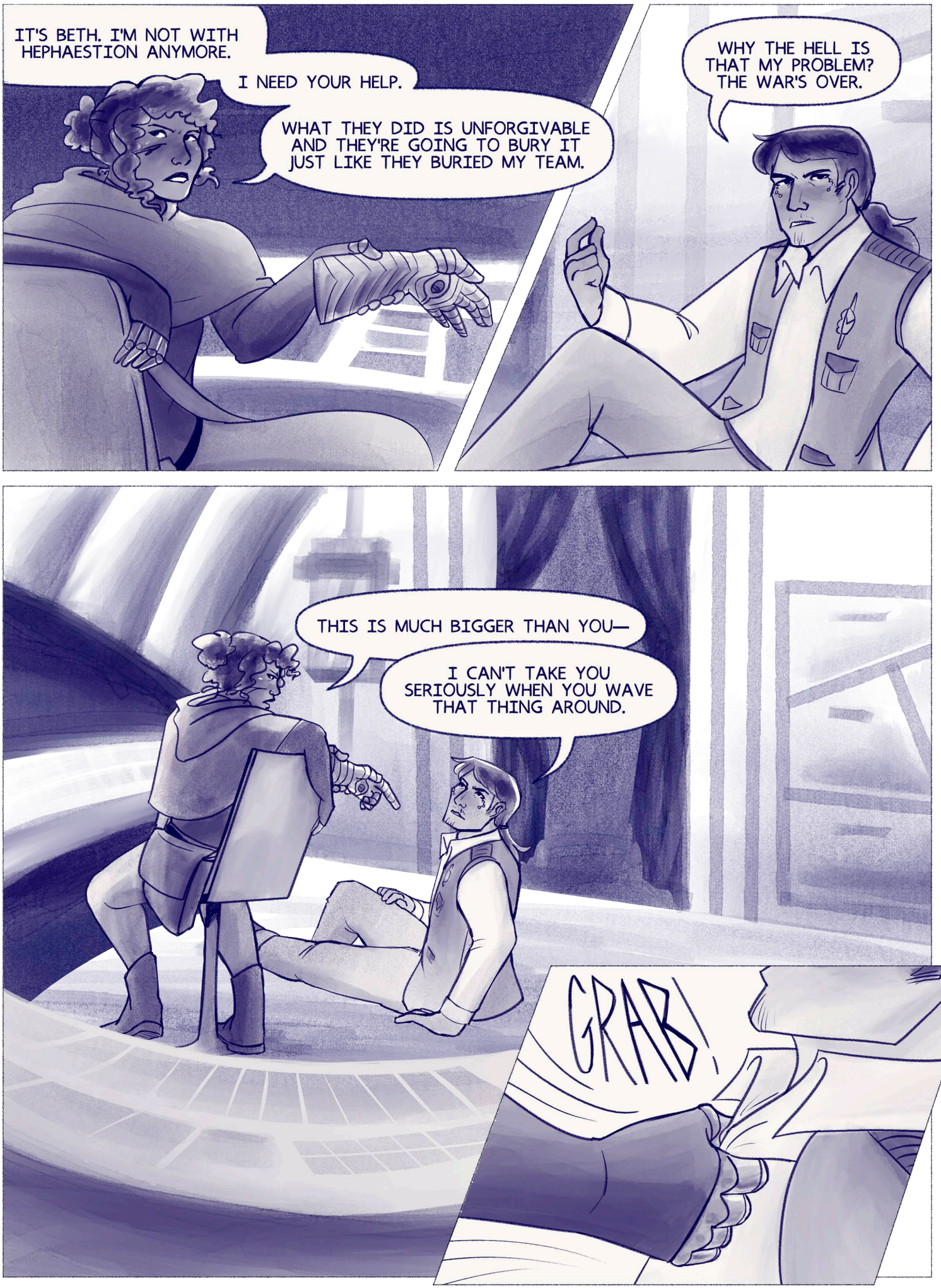
YOU'RE LUCKY I KNOW YA, KID. IT'S PAST CLOSING.
MEANS IT'S QUIETER.
"...PARADE TODAY COMMEMORATING THE SURRENDER OF THE OUTER COLONIES."
"WE ARE PROUD TO UNVEIL THE HEPHAESTION PROGRAM MEMORIAL, CELEBRATING THE NINE HEROES WHO LOST THEIR LIVES FOR OUR SOLAR SYSTEM."
GUESS THOSE FANCY GADGETS DIDN'T HELP, AFTER ALL.
RIGHT, SORE SUBJECT. I'LL STOP MY YAPPING.
YOU WERE THERE.
IF ANYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO BE ANGRY, IT'S YOU.


COSMIC CARGO
??
HUH...

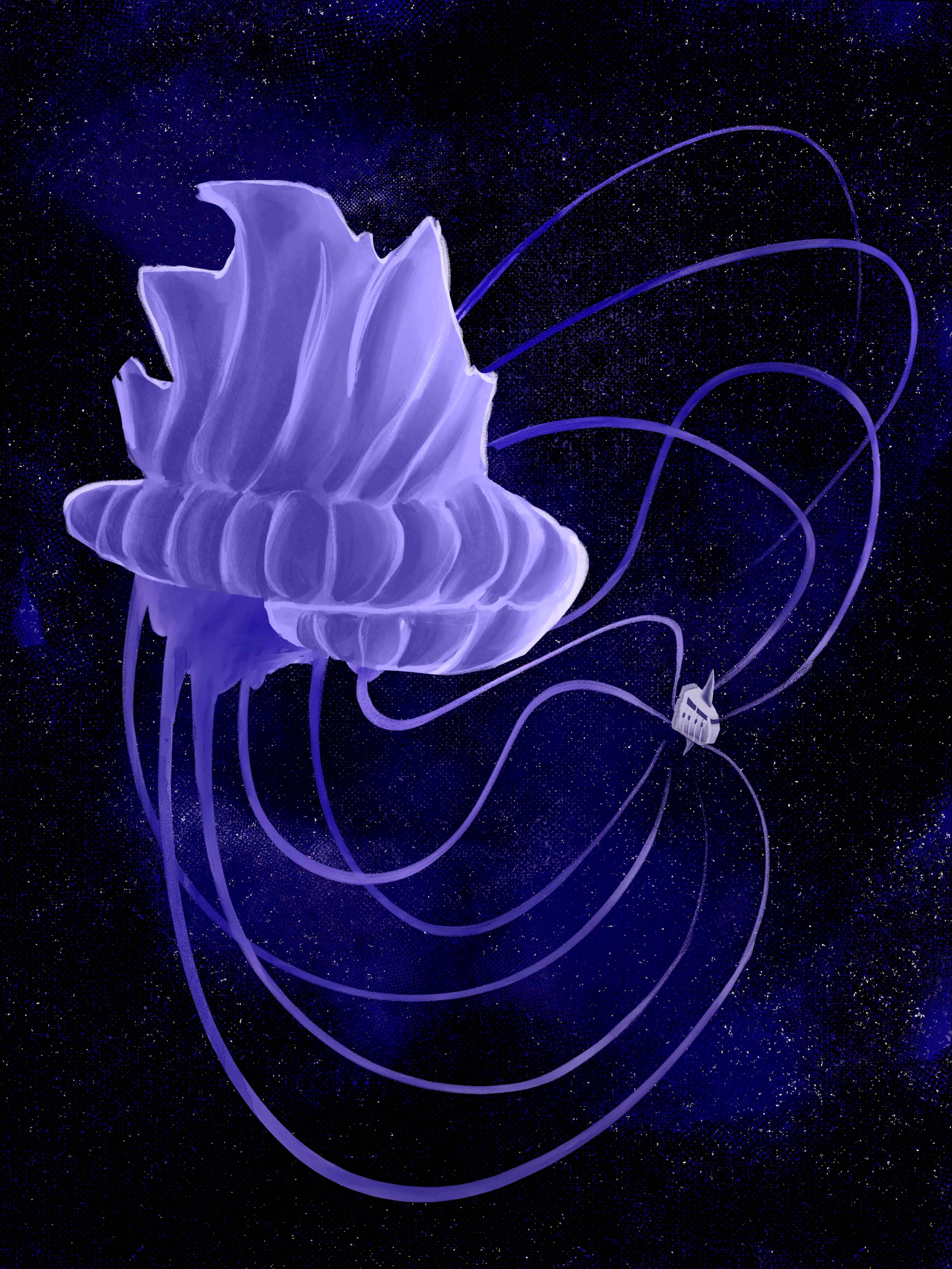
THWACK!!

SORRY FOR TAKING YOUR SHIP. IT'S FOR A GOOD CAUSE, I PROMISE.
GOOD ENOUGH TO KNOCK ME OUT?
I PANICKED, OKAY?
I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE LOOKING FOR THIS GAUNTLET.
WAIT A MINUTE, I'VE SEEN YOU BEFORE.
SURPRISED I'M STILL ALIVE?
SURPRISED? YES.
DANCING IN THE STREETS? NO.

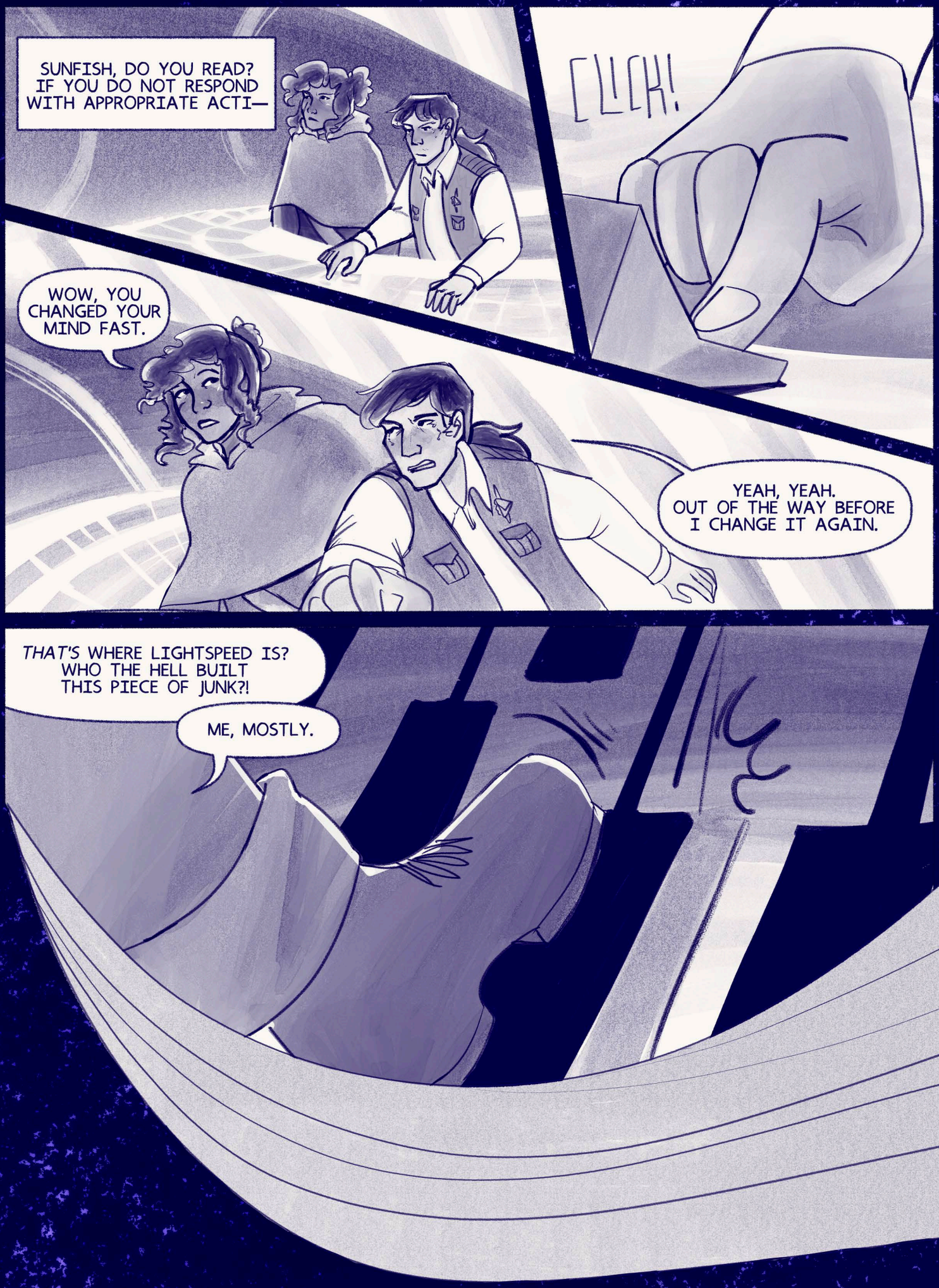
YOURE THE ONE WITH THE LIQUID NITROGEN, RIGHT?
I CAN'T IMAGINE IT'S A GOOD FEELING, FREEZING TO DEATH.
LET ALONE BEING
SHATTERED
RIGHT, AGENT URANUS?

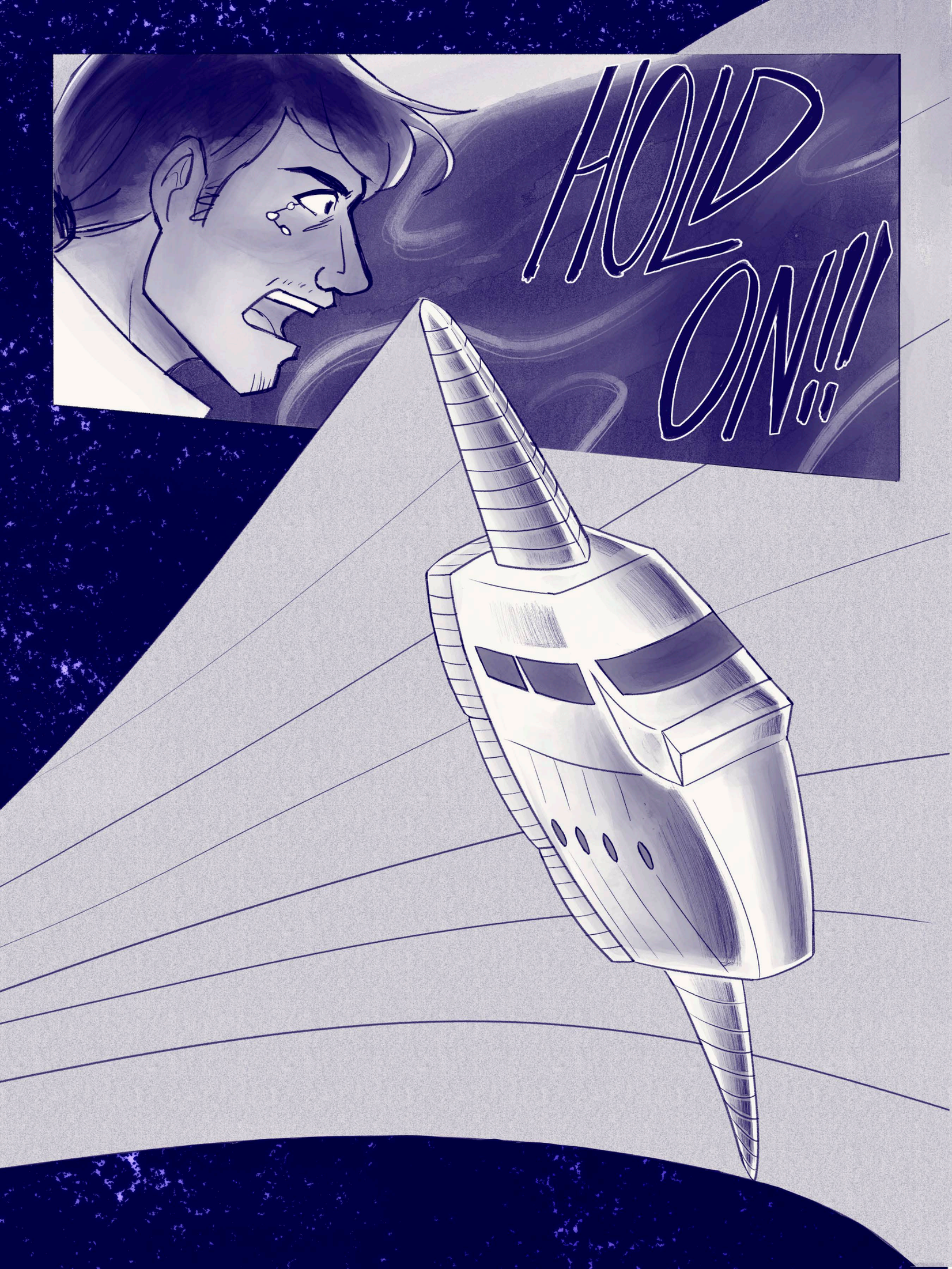

IT'S BETH. I'M NOT WITH HEPHAESTION ANYMORE.
I NEED YOUR HELP.
WHAT THEY DID IS UNFORGIVABLE AND THEY'RE GOING TO BURY IT JUST LIKE THEY BURIED MY TEAM.
WHY THE HELL IS THAT MY PROBLEM? THE WAR'S OVER.
THIS IS MUCH BIGGER THAN YOU—
I CAN'T TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY WHEN YOU WAVE THAT THING AROUND.
GRAB!

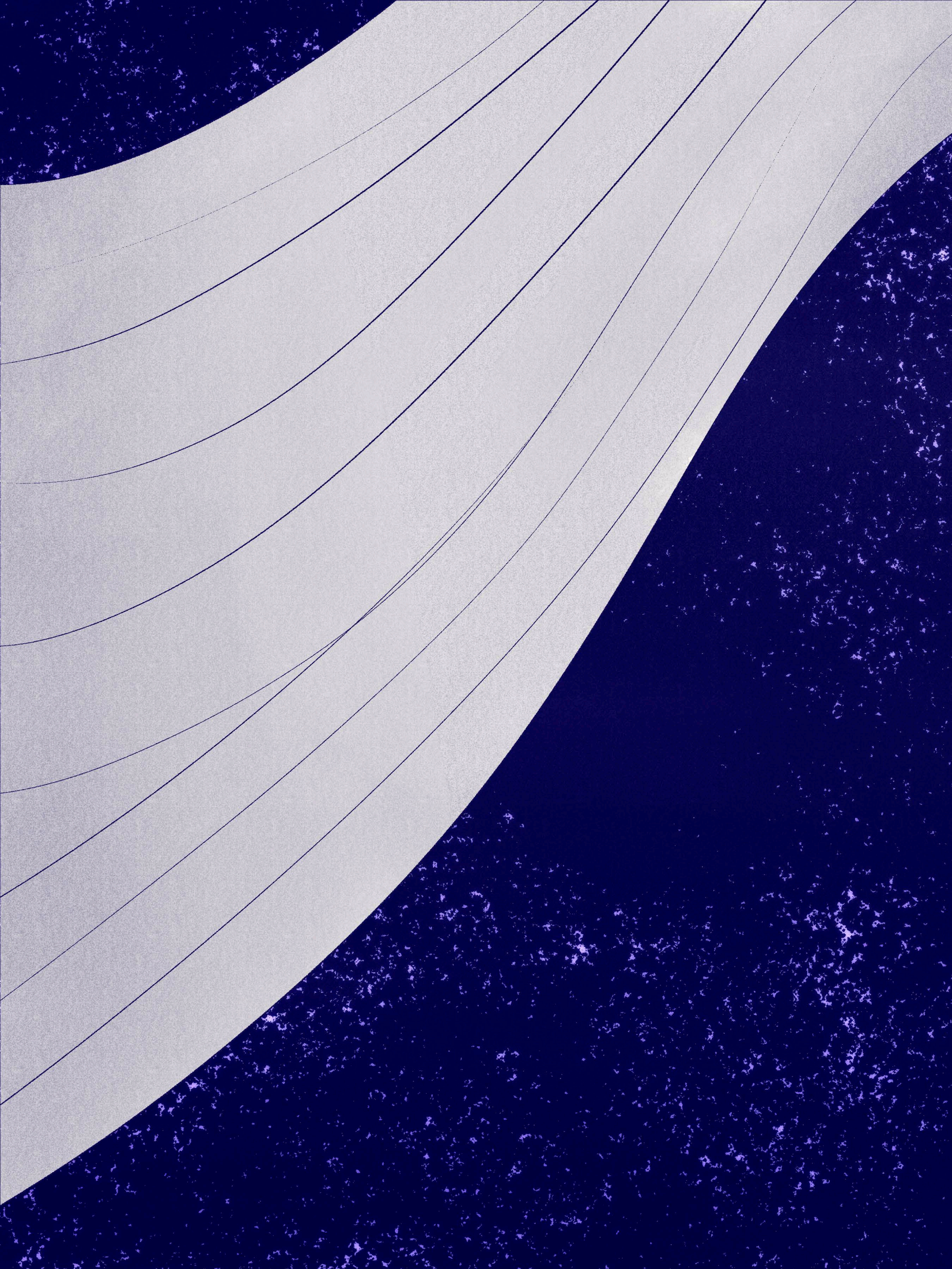
LISTEN HERE YOU LITTLE SHIT!!
IT'S NED.
CR
EEEEAAAAR
AAK
UH...

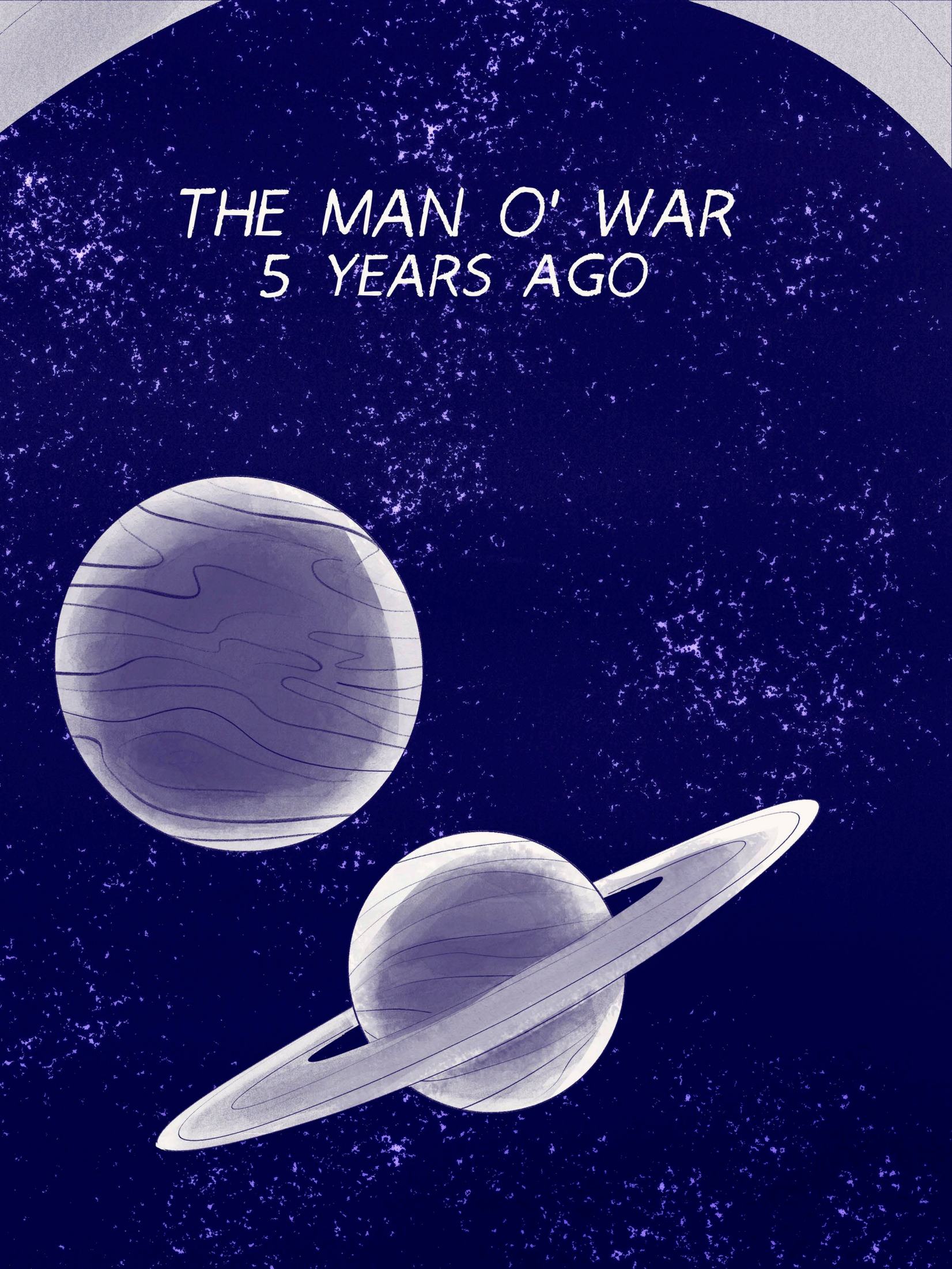


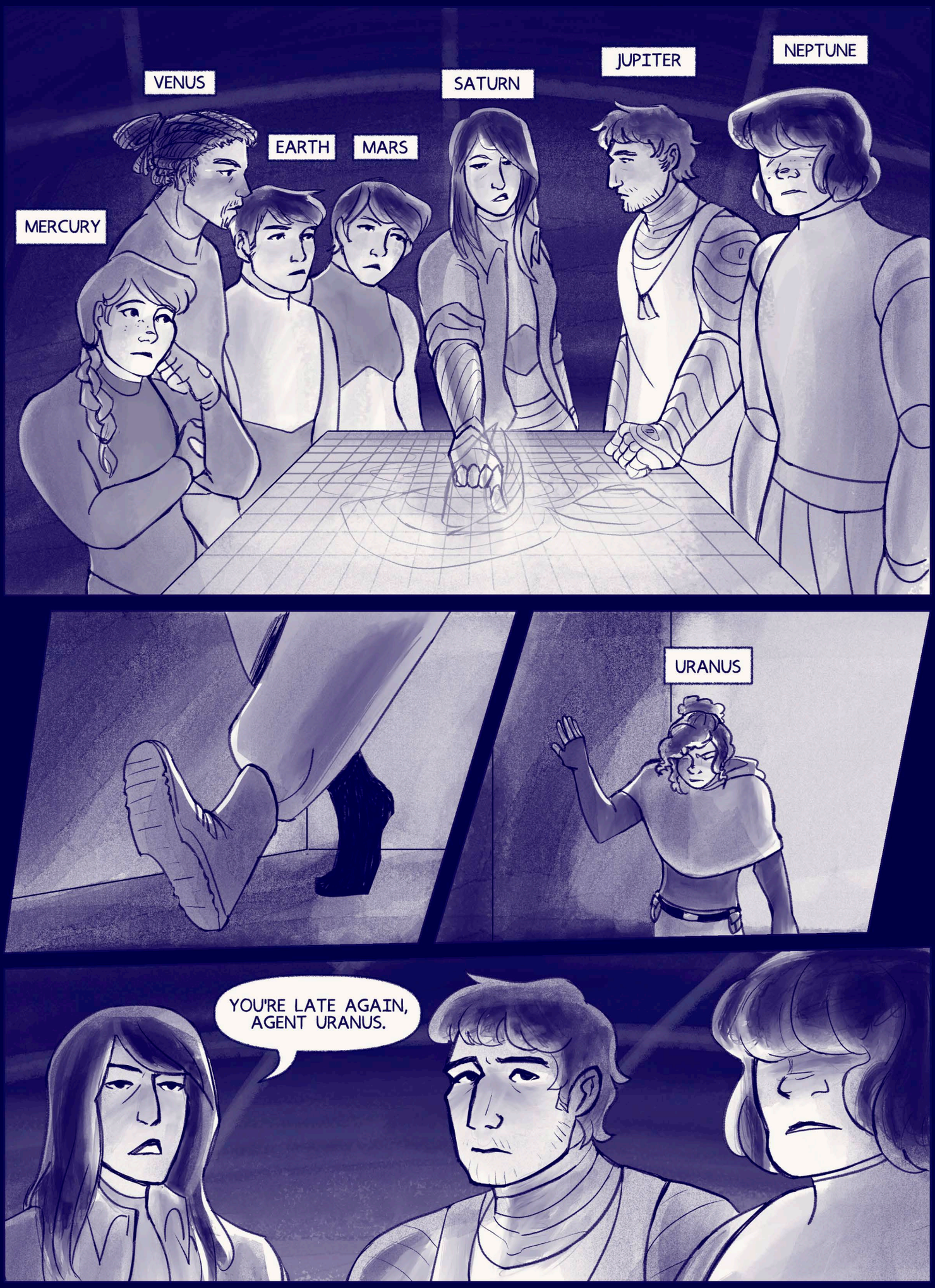
COM#1
COM#2
BEEP
BEEP
DESIGNATION SUNFISH, YOU ARE UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR HARBORING A TRAITOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE.
WE REQUEST YOUR FULL COMPLIANCE TO MANDATORY BOARDING AND SEARCH.
REPLY TO CONFIRM, OVER.

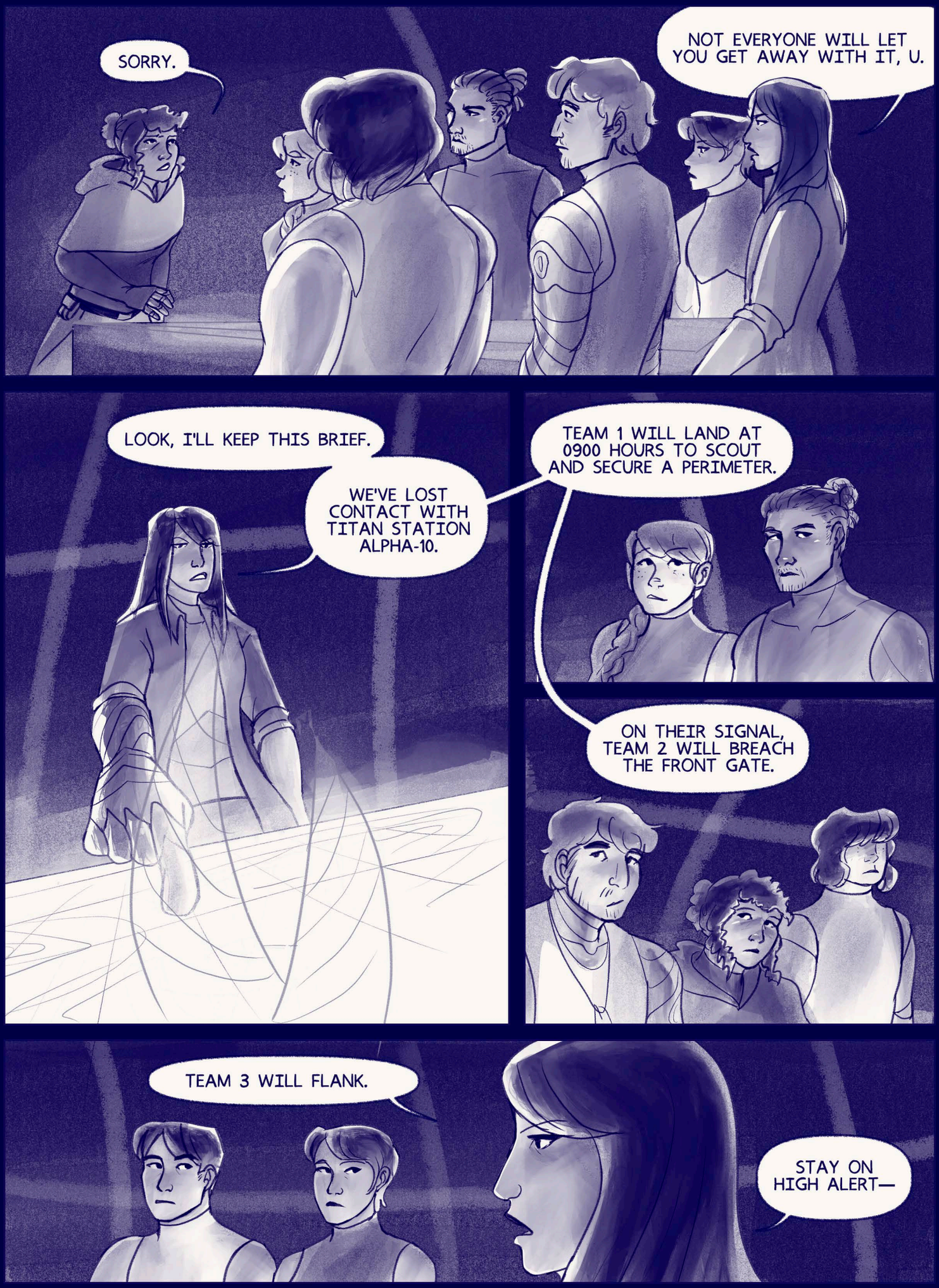

SUNFISH, DO YOU READ? IF YOU DO NOT RESPOND WITH APPROPRIATE ACTI—
CLICK!
WOW, YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND FAST.
YEAH, YEAH. OUT OF THE WAY BEFORE I CHANGE IT AGAIN.
THAT'S WHERE LIGHTSPEED IS? WHO THE HELL BUILT THIS PIECE OF JUNK?!
ME, MOSTLY.


HOLD ON!!!



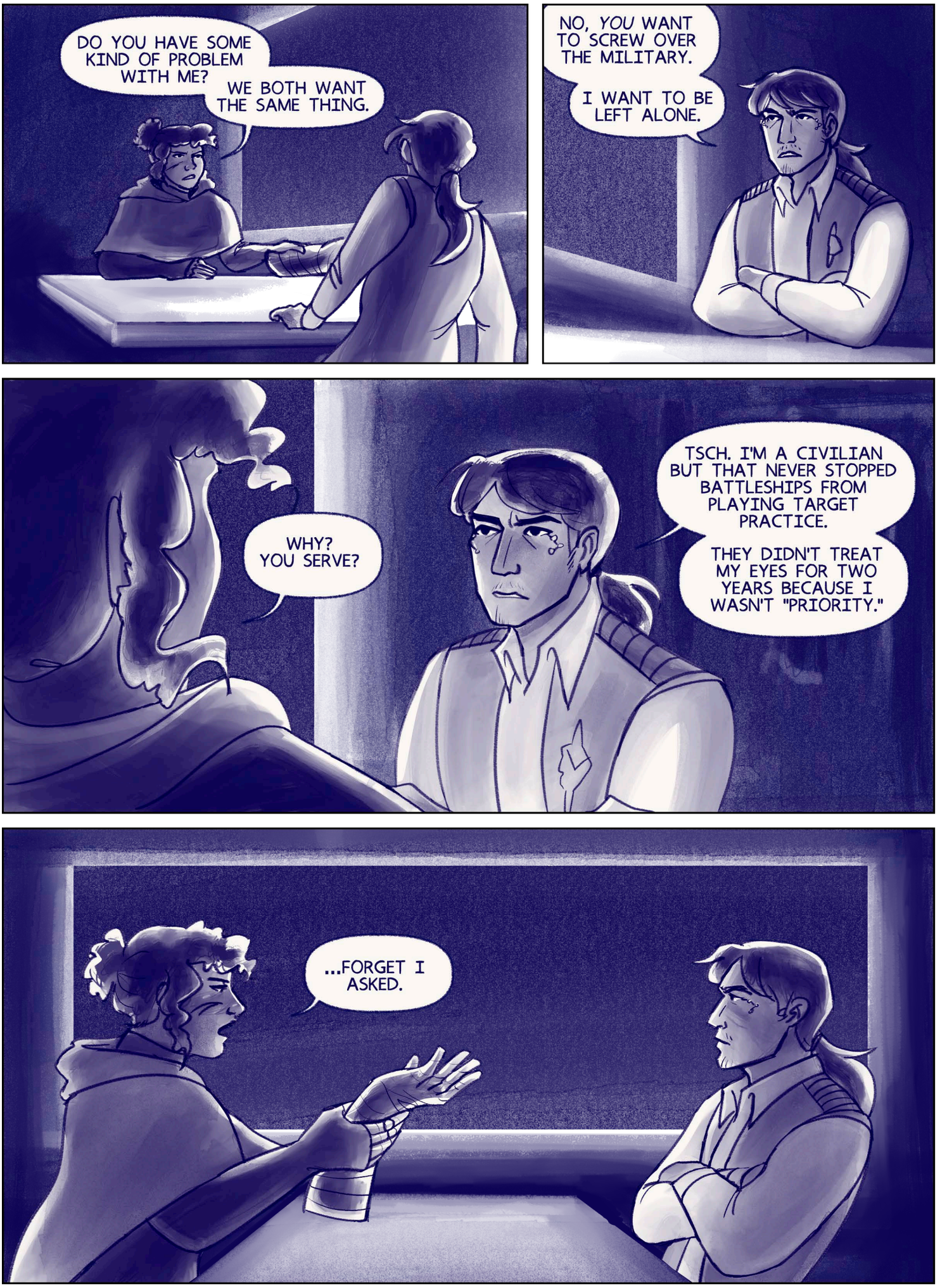

THE MAN O' WAR
5 YEARS AGO


MERCURY
VENUS
EARTH
MARS
SATURN
JUPITER
NEPTUNE
URANUS
YOU'RE LATE AGAIN, AGENT URANUS.

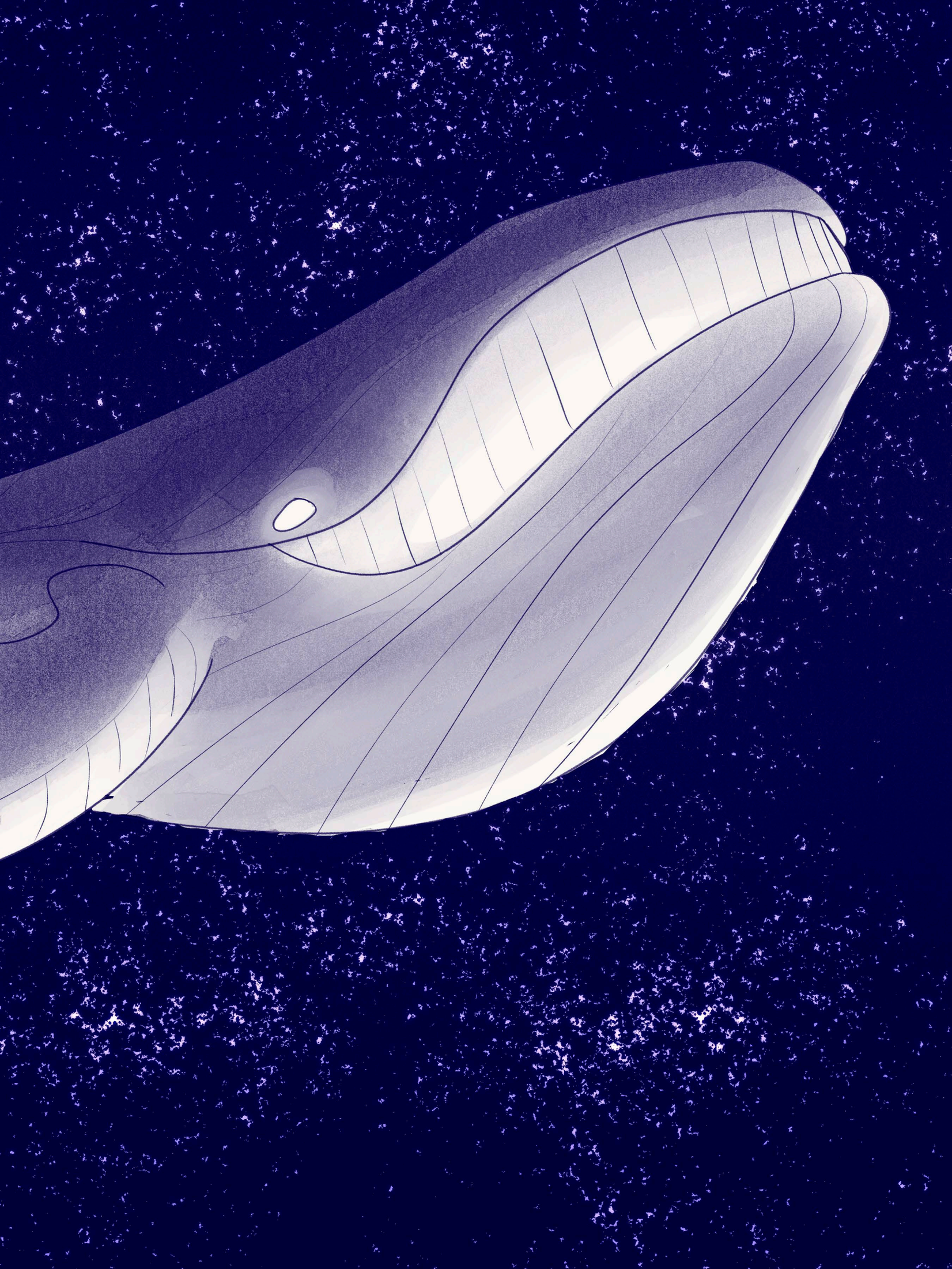

SORRY.
NOT EVERYONE WILL LET YOU GET AWAY WITH IT, U.
LOOK, I'LL KEEP THIS BRIEF.
WE'VE LOST CONTACT WITH TITAN STATION ALPHA-10.
TEAM 1 WILL LAND AT 0900 HOURS TO SCOUT AND SECURE A PERIMETER.
ON THEIR SIGNAL, TEAM 2 WILL BREACH THE FRONT GATE.
TEAM 3 WILL FLANK.
STAY ON HIGH ALERT—

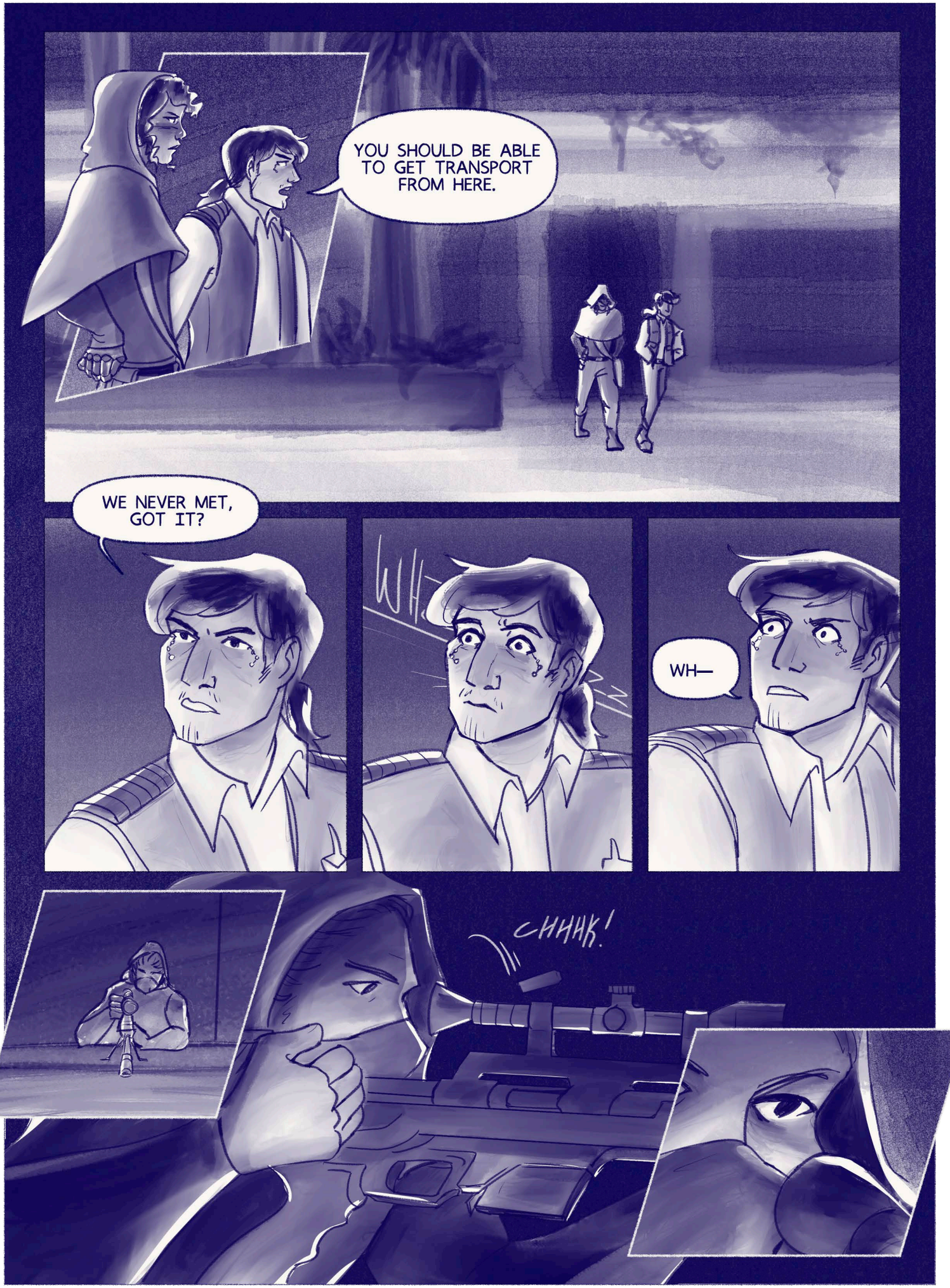
TITAN STATION ALPHA-10.
—THIS COULD BE A TRAP.
KRZZT!
SAT...URN, CO...PY?
CAN ANYONE
READ
ME?
GOD DAMMIT!
THUNK!

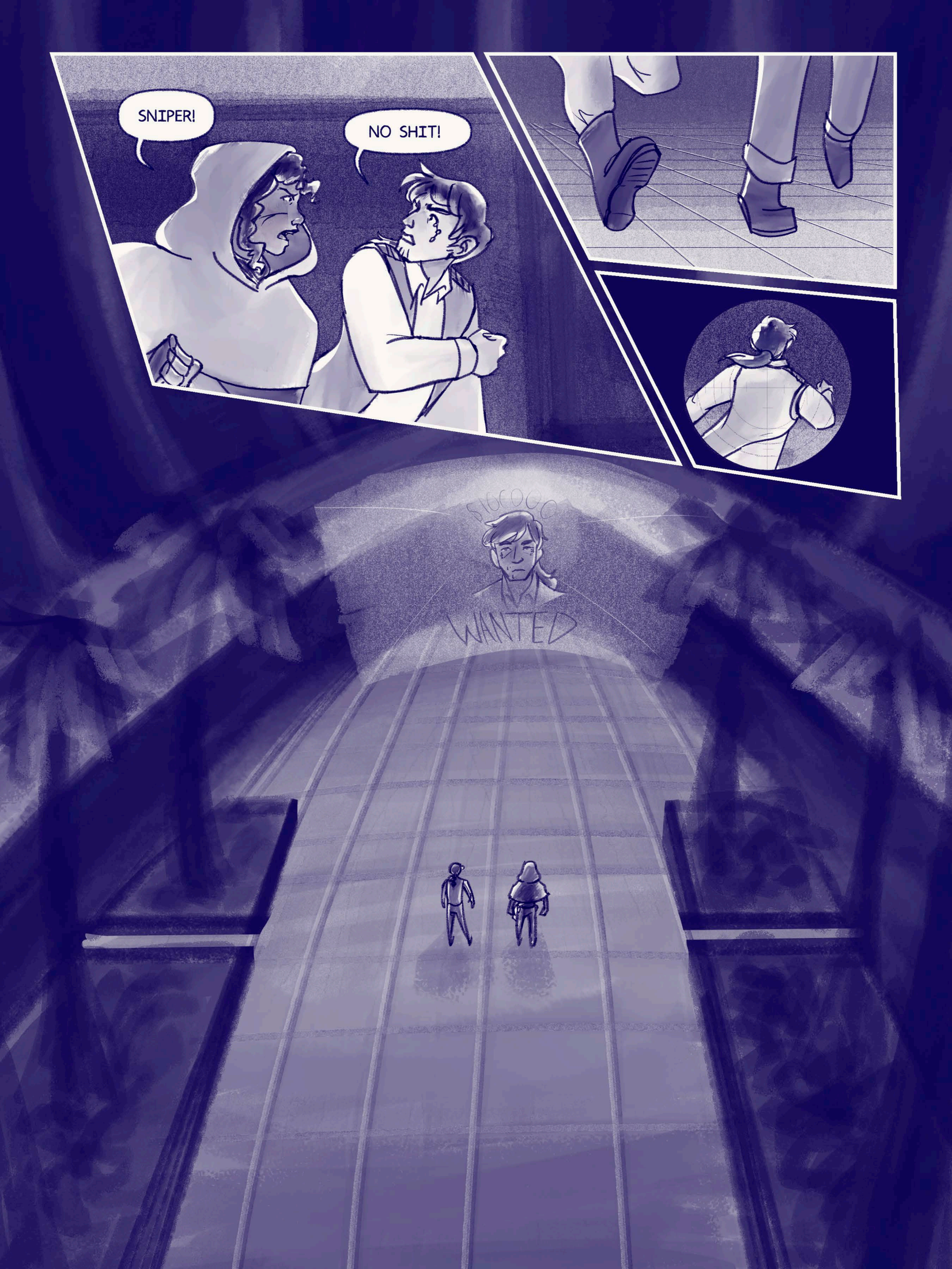
GUESS I'M LATE AGAIN, HUH?
I CAN DROP YOU OFF AT THE CLOSEST OUTPOST.
PAST THAT, I'M DONE.


DO YOU HAVE SOME KIND OF PROBLEM WITH ME?
WE BOTH WANT THE SAME THING.
NO, *YOU* WANT TO SCREW OVER THE MILITARY.
I WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE.
WHY? YOU SERVE?
TSCH. I'M A CIVILIAN BUT THAT NEVER STOPPED BATTLESHIPS FROM PLAYING TARGET PRACTICE.
THEY DIDN'T TREAT MY EYES FOR TWO YEARS BECAUSE I WASN'T "PRIORITY."
...FORGET I ASKED.

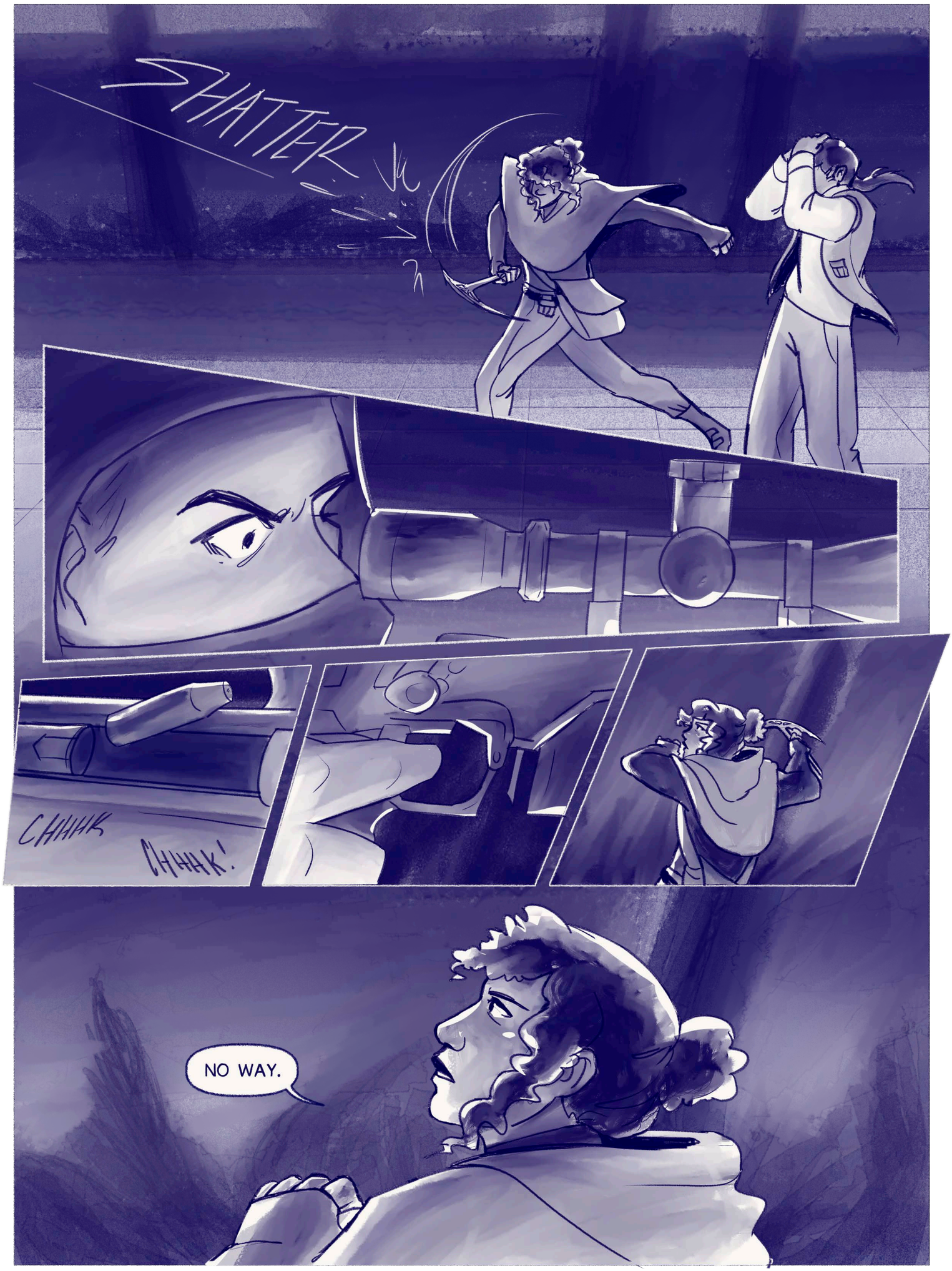
BALEEN MARKET
OUTPOST
THIS IS IT.
THE WEST END IS A GHOST TOWN,
BUT QUIET IS WHAT
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, HUH?




YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET TRANSPORT FROM HERE.
WE NEVER MET, GOT IT?
WH—
WH—
CHHHK!

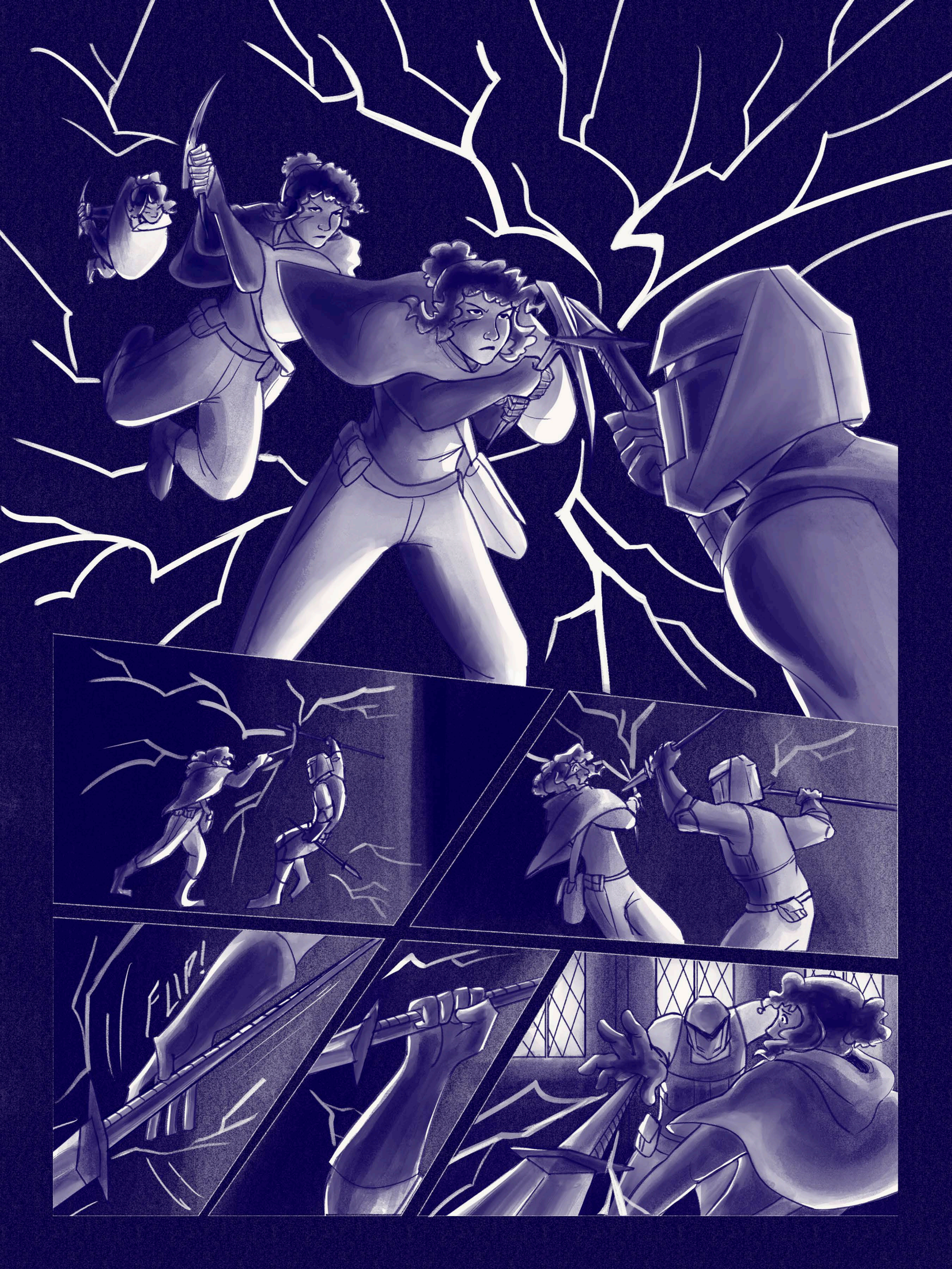

SNIPER!
NO SHIT!
WANTED

THIS IS YOUR FAULT, YOU KNOW.
TAKE COVER!
WHAT?
CRASH!!!

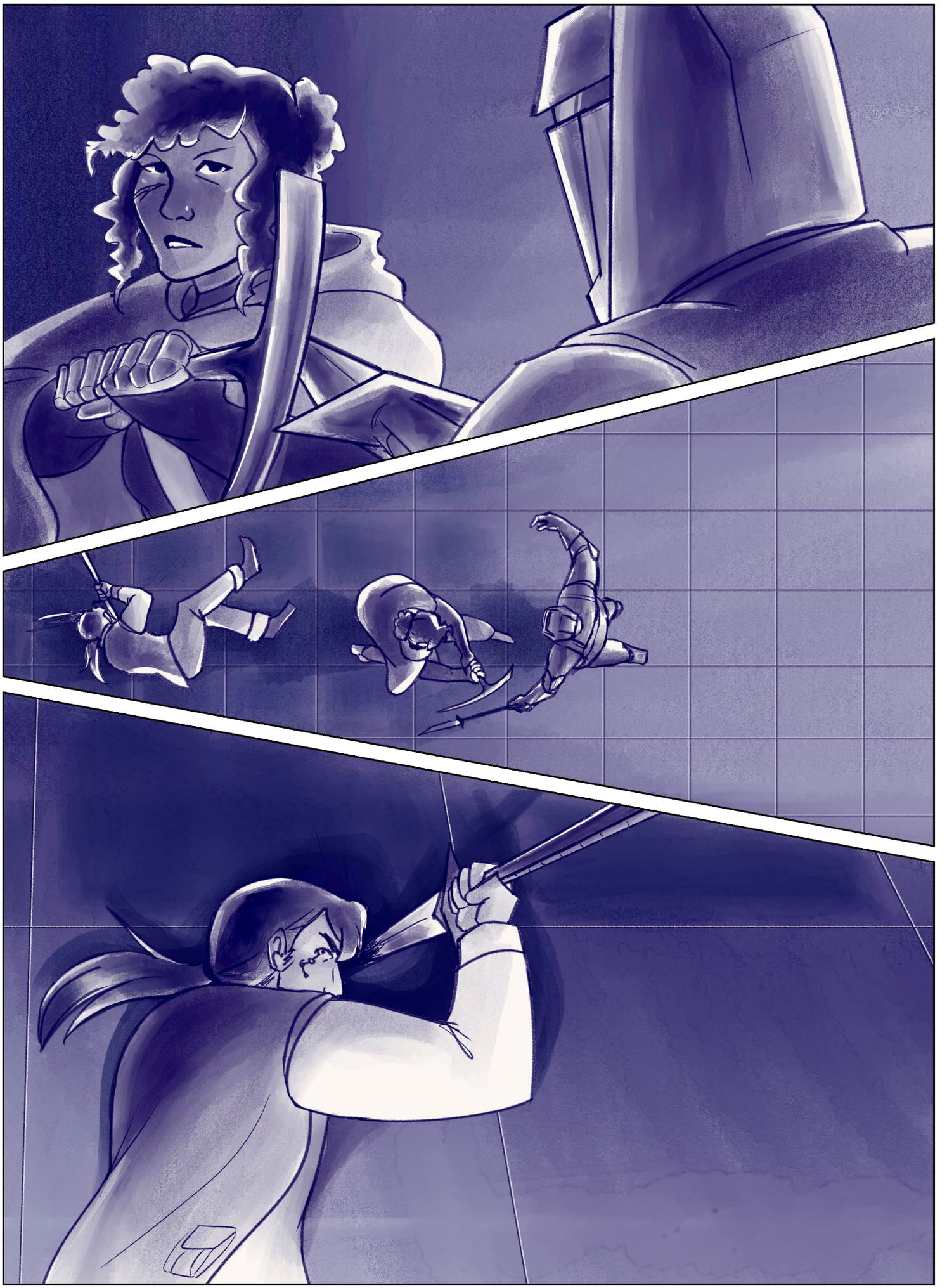

SHATTER
CHHHK
CHHHK!
NO WAY.

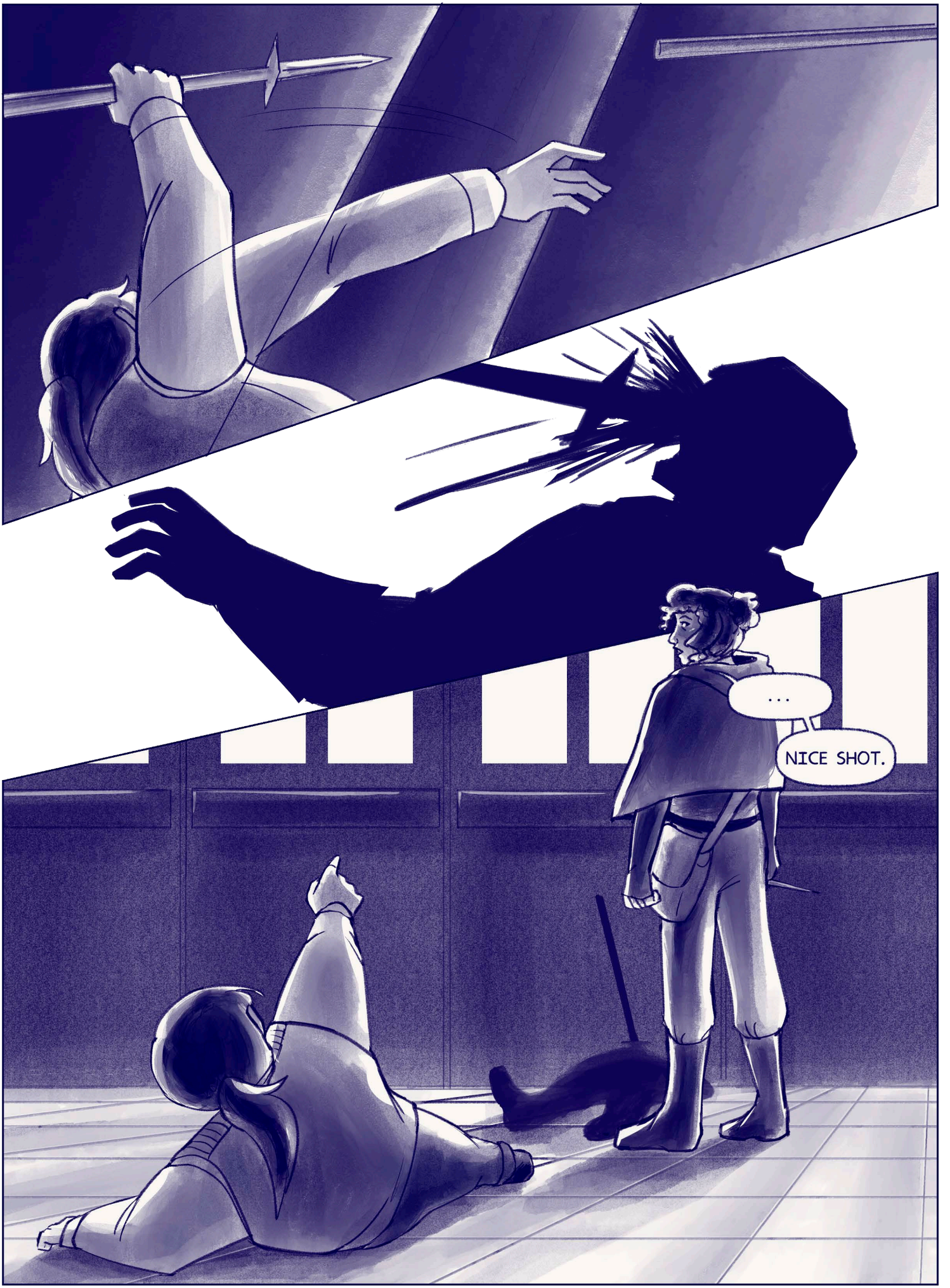
CHAPTER 2
PLUTO

BUT-
COME ON!
KZZRT

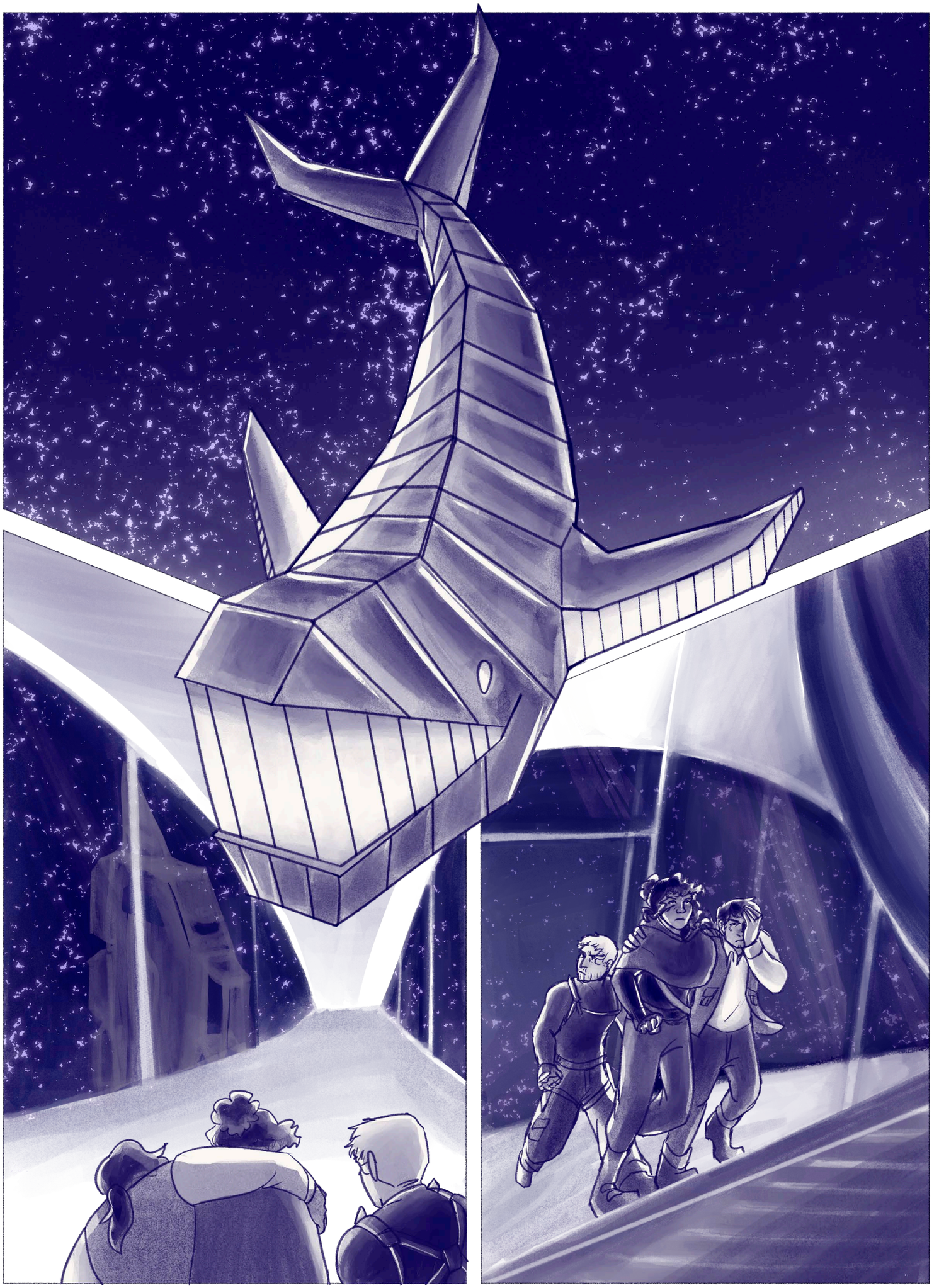

FLIP!

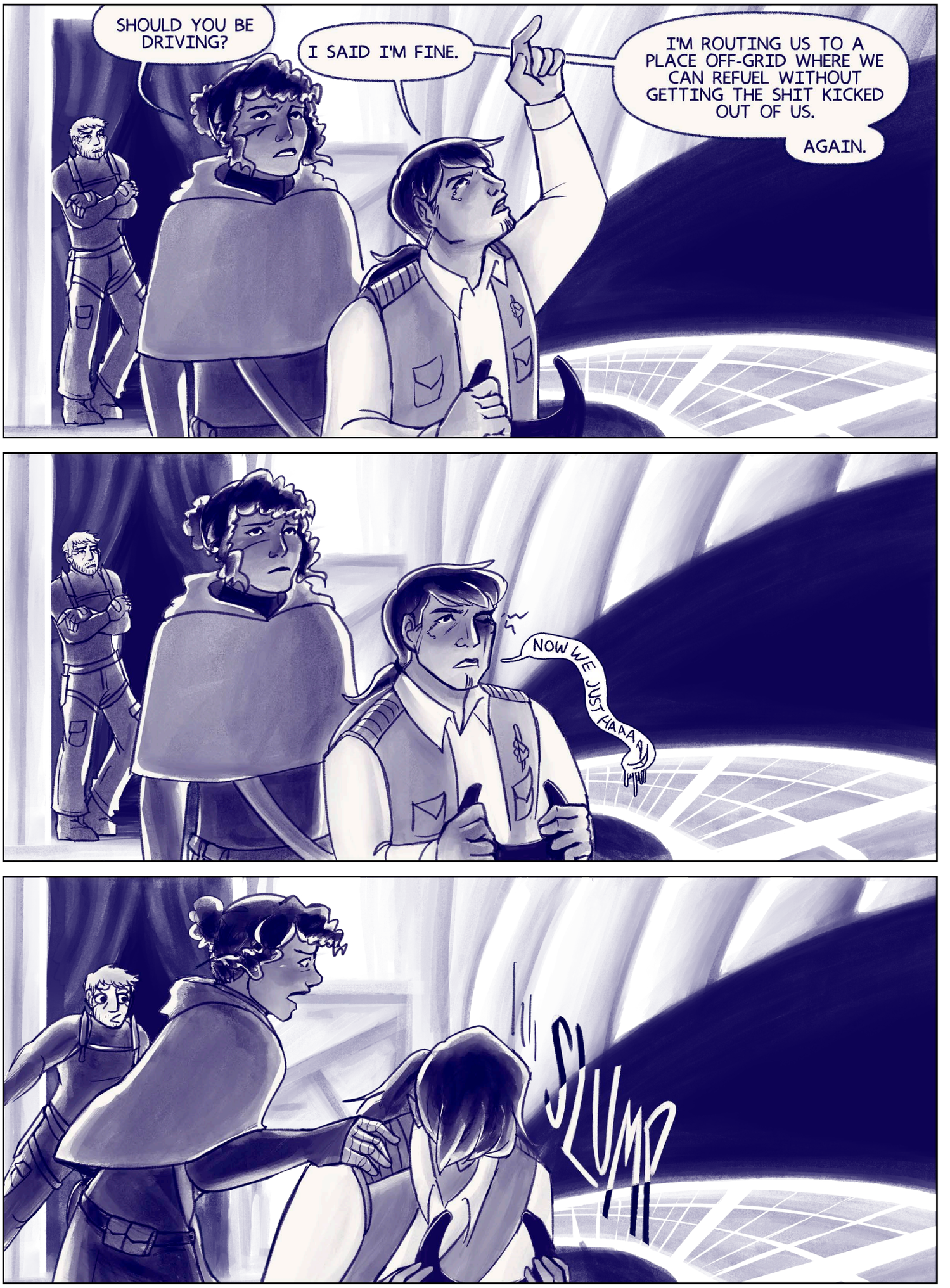
NED!!!




...
NICE SHOT.

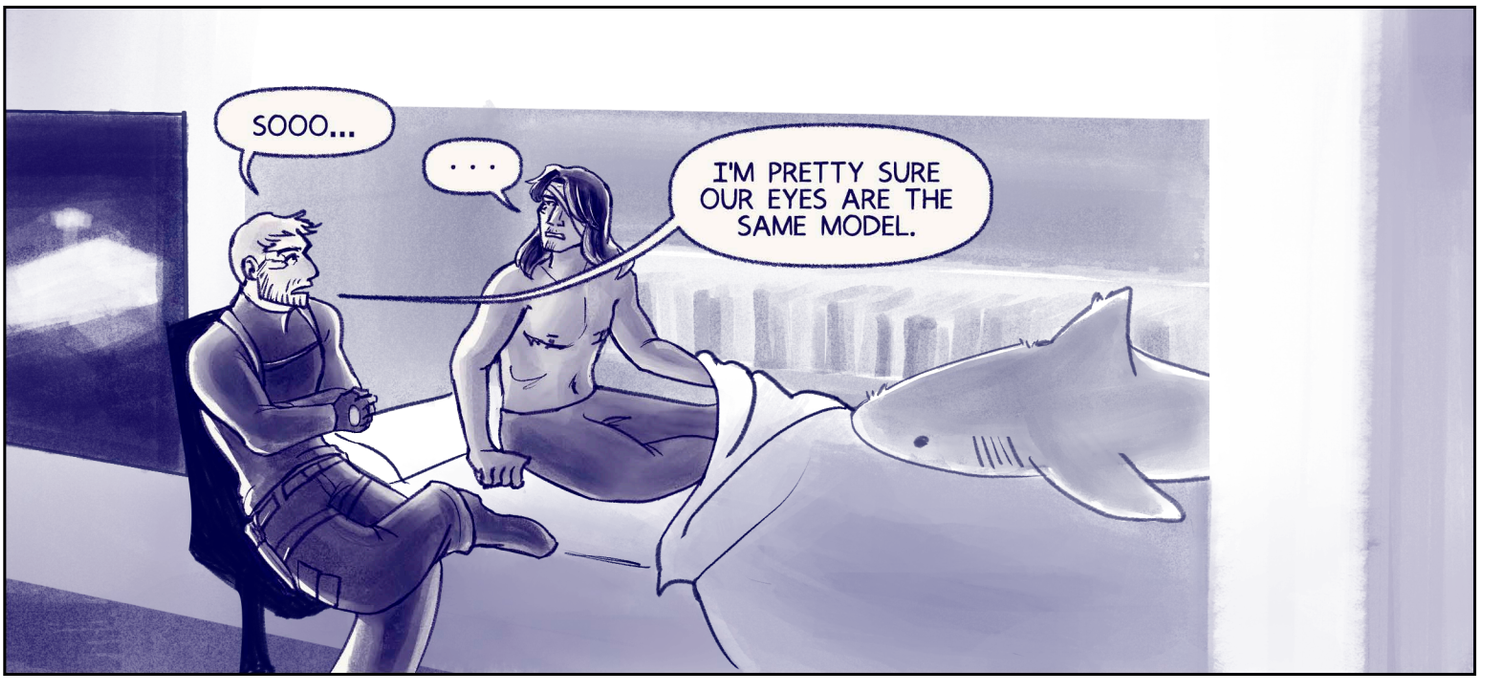
YOU OKAY?
THIS WAY!
THANKS FOR THE BACKUP.
YOU TRY RUNNING A FOUR MINUTE MILE AT THIRTY TWO.
I BROUGHT AN EEL, BUT I THINK WE'LL NEED A BIGGER SHIP FOR THREE—
WE'RE TAKING MINE.
WHAT?
JUST GO WITH IT. I OWE HIM ONE.

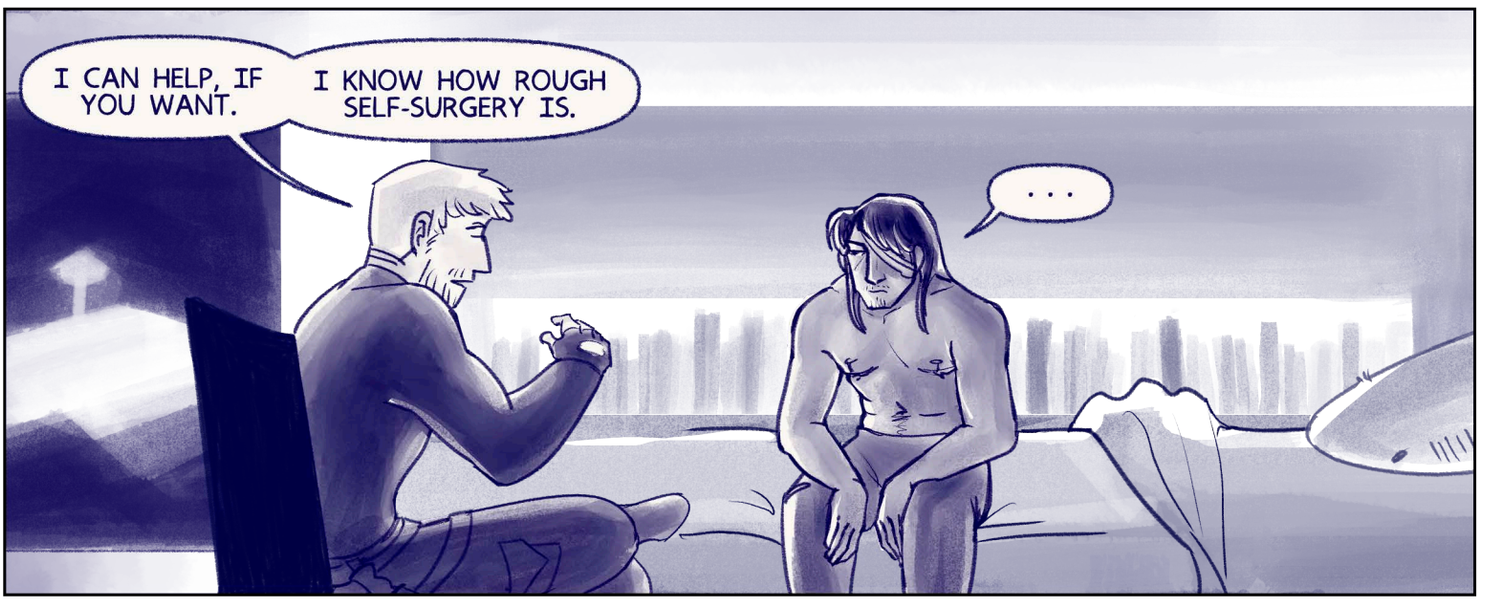


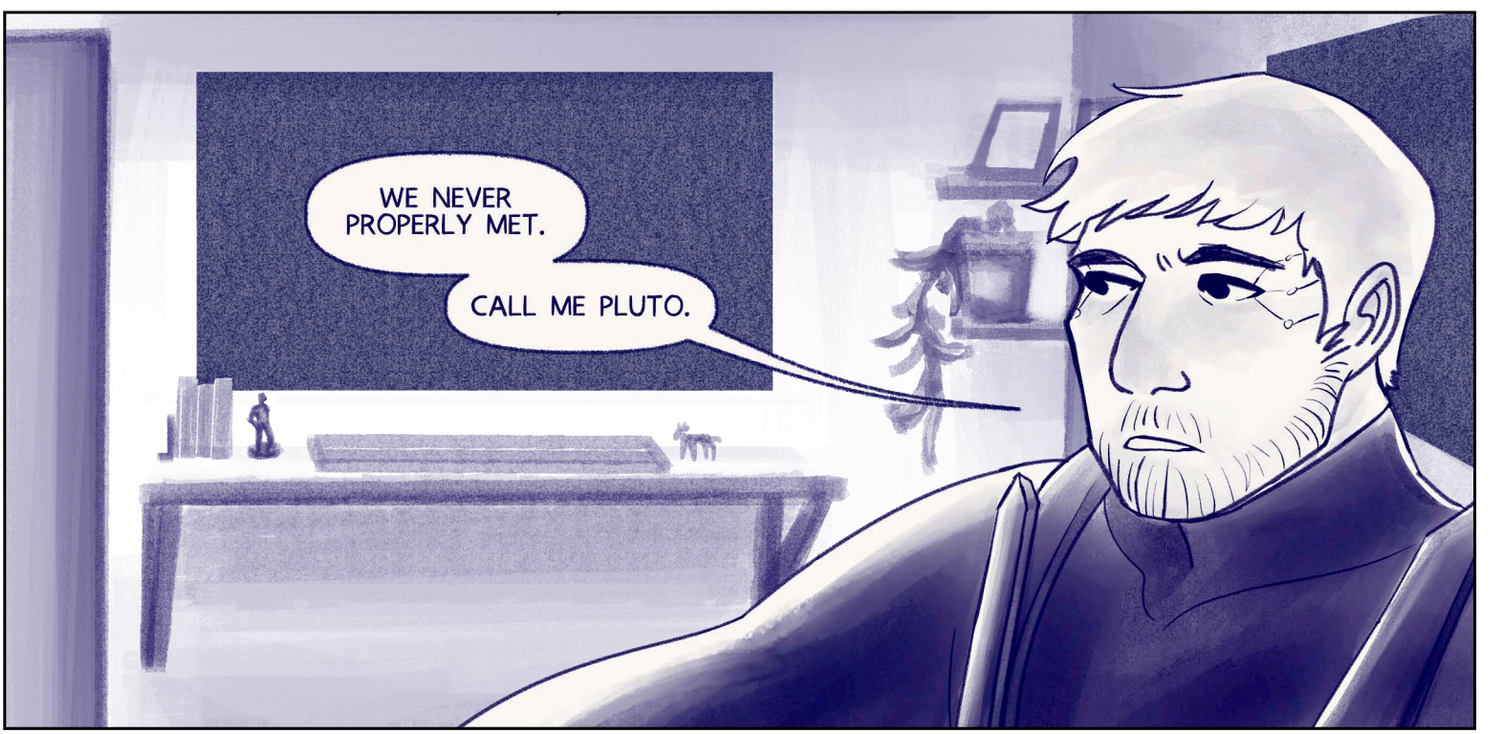

SHOULD YOU BE DRIVING?
I SAID I'M FINE.
I'M ROUTING US TO A PLACE OFF-GRID WHERE WE CAN REFUEL WITHOUT GETTING THE SHIT KICKED OUT OF US.
AGAIN.
NOW WE JUST HAAA
SLUMP

IT'S NOT A BIOLOGICAL ISSUE THAT CAN BE WAVED AWAY BY JUPITER'S GAUNTLET.
HE COULD ALSO BLEED OUT WITHOUT IT.
OR IT'LL OVERHEAL. WHO KNOWS WHAT THAT WILL DO TO HIS CYBERNETICS?
WE HAVE OUR HANDS ON SOME OF THE BEST MEDICAL TECH—
YOU MEAN THE TECHNOLOGY THAT GOT EVERYONE KILLED?

IF YOU'RE SUCH AN EXPERT, GO AHEAD.
URGH.
UH...GOOD MORNING?
THIS IS DEFINITELY THE LOUDEST THIS ROOM HAS EVER BEEN.

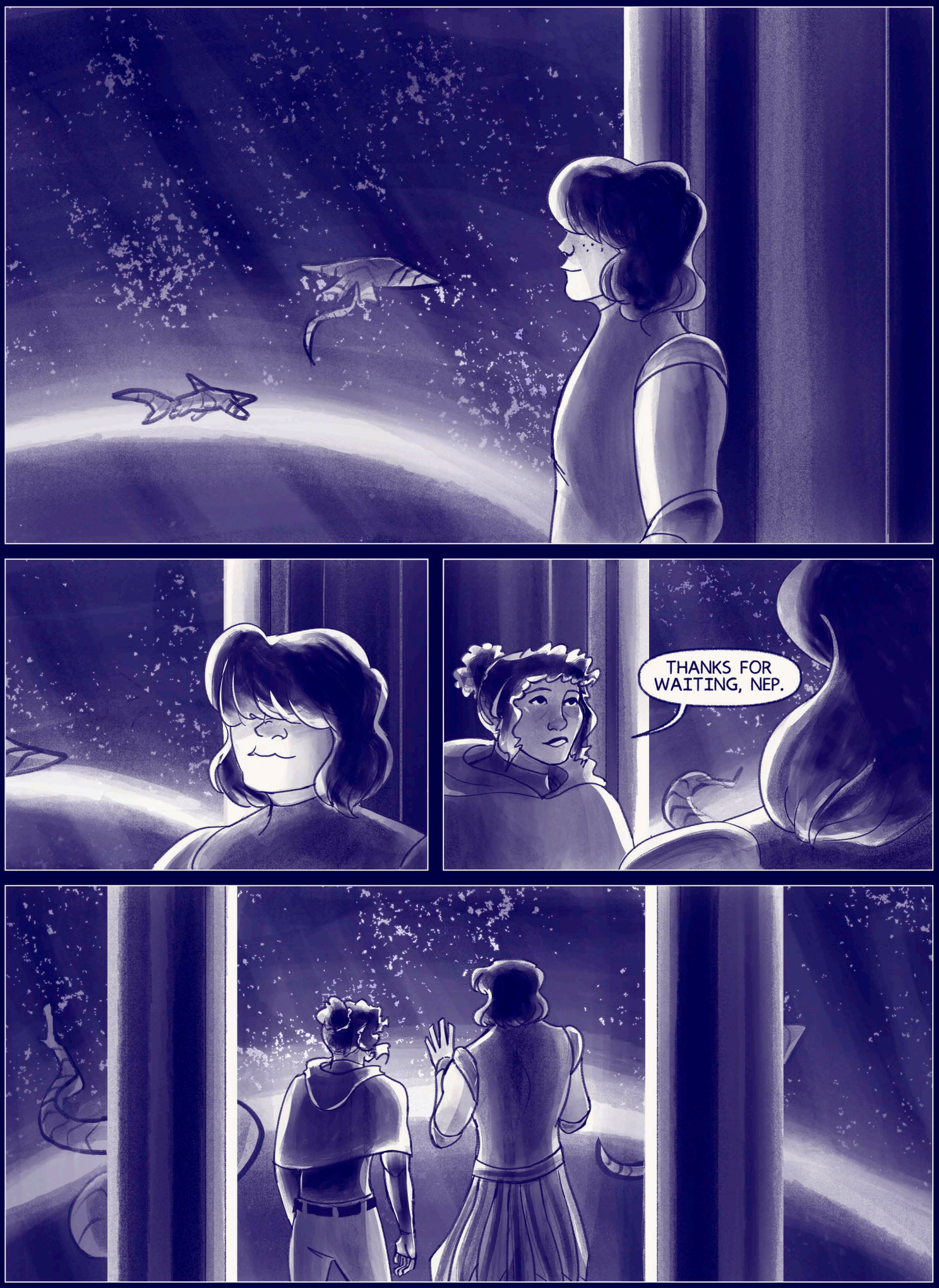

SOOO...
. . .
I'M PRETTY SURE OUR EYES ARE THE SAME MODEL.


I CAN HELP, IF YOU WANT.
I KNOW HOW ROUGH SELF-SURGERY IS.
. . .


WE NEVER PROPERLY MET.
CALL ME PLUTO.

I THOUGHT YOU GUYS WERE NAMED AFTER PLANETS.
I GUESS IT'S FITTING.
THEY DON'T LIKE TO MENTION ME.
OH, THAT.
HEPHAESTION WAS ALWAYS GOOD AT BURYING THEIR MISTAKES.

THE MAN O' WAR
6 YEARS AGO


THANKS FOR WAITING, NEP.

MISS
YOUR
FAMILY
?
DOES IT MATTER?
THEY AREN'T HERE.

MINE
IS HERE.

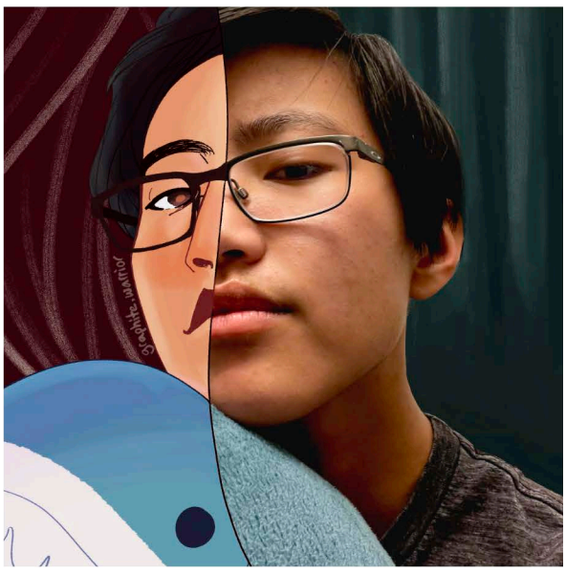
SUNFISH
PRESENT
YOU KNOW...

WE NEVER TALKED, BACK THEN.
YOU WENT M.I.A. SO EARLY ON, THIS IS KIND OF SURREAL.
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I'M SORRY.
FOR WHAT? HAVING A SEIZURE?
THEY WERE PROBABLY GOING TO RIP YOUR EYES OUT IF YOU HADN'T ESCAPED.
GORY, BUT YES.

JUST TO BE CLEAR, THIS IS NOT AN INVITATION TO GET ALL 'CHOSEN ONE' ON ME.
BUT I'M GLAD YOU'RE ALIVE.

SHOULD I GIVE YOU GUYS SOME PRIVACY?
EUGH!
NO OFFENSE.
NONE TAKEN.
PING
PING
PING
PING
THE OTHER GLOVE MUST BE IN RANGE.
WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GET THAT?

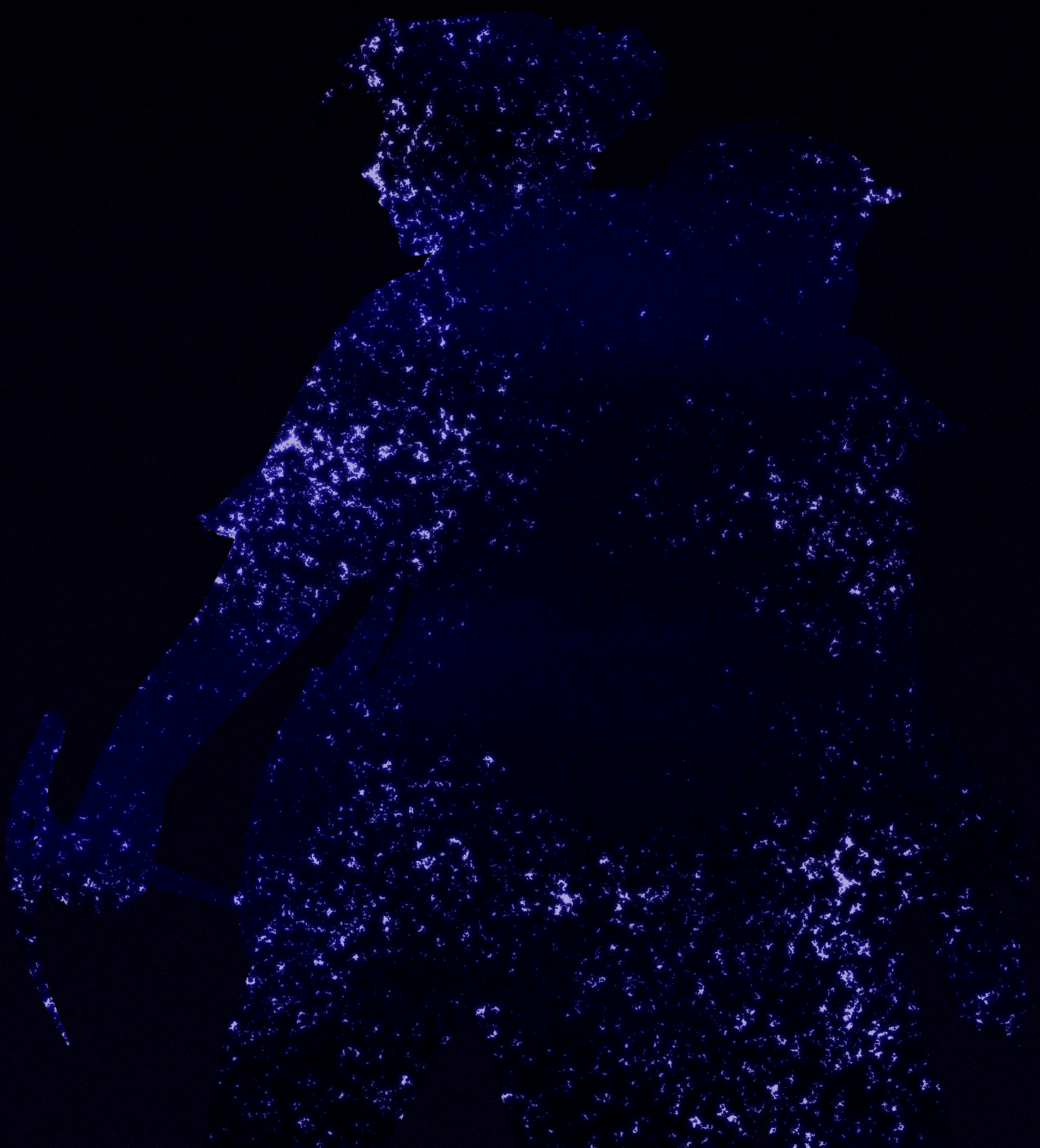
THE WEAPONS DEALER I WAS TRACKING LEFT IT ON THE SUNFISH.
THAT'S HOW THAT THING GOT ON MY SHIP?
and of course it was Leroy that backstabbing piece-of-shit —!
ALRIGHT, MOVE OVER, I NEED TO REROUTE.
EITHER OF YOU KNOW ANY REFUEL STATIONS OFF GRID?
IF I HAVE MY COORDS RIGHT, THE GAUNTLET'S POINTING AT HEPHAESTION OUTPOST DELTA-4...
...WHICH HAPPENS TO HAVE A HUGE GENERATOR.
Who's Leroy?
Shove
SIGH
DONT MAKE ME REGRET THIS.
WELL IT'S THAT OR A MEETING WITH YOUR FRIEND LEROY.



Simon Braunstein (he/him) is a Maryland based queer illustrator with a love for storytelling. He graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art with his debut comic *Hephaestion* as his thesis. Most of his work starts penciled traditionally (his favorite medium) before working up to fully rendered, digital pages. When he isn't drawing he can be found making silly YouTube videos, playing copius amounts of *Elden Ring*, and hiking in the woods on a crisp fall day.

For art and comic updates visit www.graphitewarrior.com

Contact him at graphitewarrior.gw@gmail.com

After 10 years of long-haul delivery across the Solar System—through asteroids and electron storms and warzones—the last thing Ned wants is *another* run in with a trigger-happy battleship.

Unfortunately, when a mysterious crate appears on his ship, it brings the recently ended war right to his doorstep with it.